

JOHN ALLEN CUSHING

Interviewed By: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: John, let's start in the beginning. When and where were you born?

CUSHING: I was born April 26, 1945 in Ithaca, New York. My father was a professor at Cornell University at the time.

Q: Let's talk about the family; let's talk on your father's side first. What do you know about the Cushings?

CUSHING: They came from the village of Hingham, England which was the same village that Abraham Lincoln came from. They had some religious disagreements with the church so about half the town of Hingham sold all their possessions and chartered a ship in 1638 to sail to North America, where they established the town of Hingham, Massachusetts, which is now a suburb of Boston. My ancestor is Matthew. Matthew sailed over and I think John was also born in England so it is Matthew, John, Matthew, Matthew, Leavitt, Leavitt, Leavitt, Francis Marion, Marion Jay, and Robert Leavitt Cushing, my father. I am the eleventh generation.

Farther back than that, they were Vikings, descended from Hrolf, or Rollo. They were Norsemen, they came into northern France and converted to Christianity and got some land there. One of my ancestors was a half brother to William the Conqueror so the family got a fairly large tract of land in England, southwest of Norwich.

My great grandfather was too young for the Civil War but two of his three elder brothers fought. The eldest brother was impressed into the Emergency Pennsylvania Reserves during the invasion of 1863 but didn't see any combat, but the two others, Benjamin Jay and Leavitt Wilson Cushing both fought with the Army Potomac throughout most of the war. They were both wounded at Fredericksburg. Leavitt was wounded again at Gettysburg so he was put into a hospital in Philadelphia. He got out just in time for the battles of the Wilderness and Spotsylvania and then fought at Petersburg in June of 1864. They were both with Company G of the 53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry. Some foolish officer sent them out on a large-scale reconnaissance without any support or skirmishers or anything so 1,600 Union soldiers were rounded up by the Confederates and were kept on Belle Isle near Richmond for a while, and then they were put on a rickety old train to go to Andersonville, but between Lynchburg and Danville there was a break in the rail lines so they were marched and they stopped one night in a field. The guards told them they could go down to the stream by the field and get a cup of water whenever they wanted. They didn't have to check in or anything so Leavitt was down there during the daytime getting a cup of water. He noticed sort of a shallow, natural depression in the bank so he went down there about three in the morning. I think he mentioned briefly to the Confederate guard that he was going to get a drink of water and scooped out the hole a little more with his tin cup, hiding the dirt and then crawled in backwards pulling in a bunch of brush in over himself. When they marched away that morning they couldn't find him and they didn't have time to wait around so they just left without him.

Two little boys were looking for souvenirs from where all these Union soldiers had been held prisoner and so one of them actually fell through the hole and landed on him. He said, "Don't worry. I won't hurt you," brushed himself off, and took off into the woods.

It took him about five or six weeks to get back to the Union lines in West Virginia. He would sometimes stop at a house and ask for food and they would give him something or occasionally he would dig up some potatoes, milk a cow, pick some berries or something, but he managed. He had to outrun and evade groups of pursuers at least twice, but he finally found an old farmer who told him where the Union lines were and allowed him to stay at his house, although they were going to have a religious meeting there. He told him he'd better take a couple of books and go into the woods because there were some Confederate sympathizers who would be coming to the meeting and he didn't want his house burned down.

At any rate, he made it back to the Union lines in West Virginia, got some new clothes, and hitched rides on various trains back to northern Pennsylvania. He had lost about 25 pounds by then. He was down to about say, 5' 8" and 125. He weighed 150 before he was captured.

He went back to his hometown of Ulysses, Pennsylvania and took some time off. He wrote to the captain that he had escaped and he wanted some time off. He was there until about January, 1865 at which point he decided to rejoin his regiment so he caught a series of trains and a boat and got all the way back down to Petersburg. He was there when the Confederate lines collapsed in early April so he was at Appomattox with his brother when Lee surrendered. He was mustered out June 30.

Leavitt's brother Benjamin actually rose from private to brevet second lieutenant, was put in charge of the commissary so he escaped some of the severe fighting of the later part of the war because he was bringing up supplies and so forth.

My great grandfather, Francis Marion Cushing was 18 when the war ended. The farm where they lived grew timothy hay which was for the draft horses of Philadelphia and New York City. They just shipped the hay on the rail lines to the cities to feed all the horses that were in use at the time.

It was concluded the farm was too small to support all of them so in 1872 he went out to Nebraska with a few other people, got to the end of the railway and then walked north until he found a good place, a slight hill overlooking the Loup River and became a homesteader, sod buster, dug a little a hill and proved up his claim. He had 640 acres. As soon as he had it fenced off and got title to the land, he went off up to the Black Hills and found work digging sluices for gold mining companies. He then became a bridge carpenter for a railroad company, not the original transcontinental railway but one of the other ones. I have some letters from him because I was in Ulysses Pennsylvania to visit the graves of Leavitt and Benjamin, and a librarian there gave me the name and number of a relative descended from Benjamin. I got in touch with her and she had saved four of my great grandfather's letters that he had written; two from Nebraska, one from Idaho and one from eastern Oregon as he was building bridges for the railways.

He also hunted sometimes. If he got tired of building a bridge or if there wasn't any work that day, he would get an advance on his pay, buy ammunition and hunt antelope and buffalo and then sell the meat to the railway to feed to the work crews.

My grandfather was born in 1887 and was a very promising baseball pitcher as a young man. He was scouted by the St. Louis Browns but his mother was a very devout Christian and said, "You cannot become a baseball player because you will be forced to associate with men of low character," so he was scouted but did not sign up. He was offered a position on one of their farm teams but his mother would not allow him to go.

So my father was raised on a farm in Nebraska. My grandfather died in 1935 due to an accident on the farm while my father was at University of Nebraska. My grandmother leased the farm out and moved to Lincoln, Nebraska and became a housemother at a sorority while my father went to school. My father met my mother at the University of Nebraska. They married in 1938. He got a Masters Degree at the University of Minnesota, then was a professor at Cornell at the time I was born but he then got an offer to work for Hawaiian Pineapple Company, Dole Pineapple, so we were out there from '47 to '49. Then he decided he would go back to Cornell for awhile and resume teaching so we moved back to Ithaca for two years. He then got an offer to be the assistant director of the Pineapple Research Institute in Honolulu because the director had Lou Gehrig's disease and needed someone to help him, so he was the assistant director for two years, from 1951 to '53, when the director died. After that he became the director. He did that for about eleven years and then he became the director of the Hawaiian Sugar Planter's Association Experiment Station. He did that until his retirement and then he worked for AID on various contracts. He went over to China and did a bunch of agricultural research projects for them in China and at one point, working with the Chinese government, he designed a multiyear program for all the agricultural research to take place in China. He traveled to Laos and South Africa and China and various places, on contract, and then he eventually retired.

My mother passed away in 1990 as a result of injuries suffered due to a fall. My father moved up to Raft Island near Tacoma a few years later to live near my brother and then he died in 2001 at the age of 87.

Q: Let's talk about your mother's side of the family. What do you know about them?

CUSHING: I know very little except they were Loyalists during the Revolutionary War and so after the war their house was burned down and they fled to Canada and so for a number of generations they lived in Canada. My mother was born in Greenland, Michigan which no longer exists, but went to school either in Lauriam or Calumet. Her father was sort of ne'er do well, I guess, never really held a steady job and I don't know if he drank or what but I know my mother's family kind of fell apart and she was placed under the care of an older sister who lived in Nebraska and was able to offer her a place to live, and she was admitted to the University of Nebraska and worked her way through. I know she worked in the library. I have never met either of my grandfathers. My paternal grandfather was killed in an accident in 1935. My maternal grandfather disappeared. I was shown one photograph of him by my father and asked if I wanted a copy of the photograph and I said, "No, I don't think so."

Q: I take it you mention your mother's side, they were Loyalists in the Revolutionary War. On your father's side with a Francis Marion name of the Swamp Fox there must have been, they must have been on the Revolutionary side.

CUSHING: That's true. One or two of them served in the militia. I don't know if they were in the regular Continental Army but they were I think around Hingham, Massachusetts at the time and if a local military emergency came up, they served on the side of the revolutionaries.

The family moved from Hingham to southern New York at the time of my great, great grandfather, and then my great grandfather was born along with most of his siblings in very southern New York but then they settled in Ulysses, Pennsylvania in Potter County, just south of the state line, and that's where Company G of the 53rd Pennsylvania was raised.

Within the same family we have one Cushing who was minister to China, we have Harvey Cushing, the brain surgeon and Alonzo Hereford Cushing who was the young artillery officer who was manning the last Union cannon during Pickett's Charge, who was killed at his post, his brother William Barker Cushing who commanded a federal gunboat that sank the Confederate ram Albemarle in 1864 and subsequently was on patrol on Cuba when an American citizen was captured and detained. He told the Spanish if they didn't let this American go, he would shell the city of Havana so they allowed the American to go free.

That's pretty much it. My mother was never very enthusiastic about talking about her family. She was considerably younger than her siblings so she alluded to the fact that she was probably an accident. At any rate, she studied very hard. She got good grades, she got into the University of Nebraska and so forth but I don't think she had a particularly easy life. She said when the Depression came, they didn't notice because they were already so poor that the Depression made very little difference in how they were living.

Q: Did your mother graduate from college?

CUSHING: Yes, they both graduated. My mother graduated in 1938, my father in 1936. He then did some graduate work at the University of Minnesota but in 1944 was offered a teaching position at Cornell University.

Q: In what subject?

CUSHING: In agronomy and plant genetics.

Q: You were born in 1945 in Ithaca?

CUSHING: That's correct.

Q: How long were you in Ithaca?

CUSHING: I was there from '45 to '47, then moved over to Wahiawa on the island of Oahu from '47 to '49 and then moved back from '49 to '51 so I was there from birth until two years of age and then from four to six. I have some memories of the time around 1950, 1951.

Q: Were your real memories sort of kicking in after '51?

CUSHING: I remember bits about Ithaca. We lived near the Morse Chain Company and the Allen-Wales Adding Machine Company. You could hear the boom of the industrial machinery at night and there were parking lots for those two companies so I used to sit by the side of the exit road that led onto South Aurora Street and watch all the workers driving home from work. There was a hill we used to sled down in the winter. I went to kindergarten and part of first grade at South Hill Elementary School. My teacher was Mrs. Elsie Hanes. I left there around Thanksgiving in '51 and my dad took us to Philadelphia to see the Liberty Bell and to the Gettysburg Battlefield. For some reason he thought we should see it, so the first time I saw the Gettysburg Battlefield was in 1951 when I was six years old. I still remember the tabletop map with the colored lights. They built a new museum and that map is now gone, I think.

Q: I saw it just about a year or two ago.

By about '51 where were you, was there a place where you stayed a good portion of your childhood?

CUSHING: Yes. We rented a house up on St. Louis Heights on the island of Oahu, which looked down on Palolo Valley and also looked over Waikiki, Diamond Head and Kaimuki. It had a view of that part of the city. My dad bought a house in Manoa Valley in 1953 so I did most of first grade, all of second grade and part of third grade at Aliiolani Elementary School in Kaimuki. After that I transferred to Manoa Elementary School in Manoa Valley.

Q: Let's talk about your various memories of growing up as a kid in Hawaii. What was it like?

CUSHING: We were staying at a temporary house on St. Louis Heights until we could move into the rental and a bunch of kids approached and began speaking to me in pidgin English and they asked if I were from the mainland. "You from mainland?" I said, "No, I'm from Ithaca." "Hey, you from mainland?" I said, "I just told you, I'm from Ithaca. What's the matter with you people?"

So my parents said, "John, John. 'Mainland' means all of the United States so you are from the mainland, so tell them you are from the mainland." Gradually I learned if I did not learn pidgin, I would not get beaten up regularly at school for being a snob, so I learned how to speak pidgin.

They had what they called the English standard schools there. My parents sent us to public schools but there were certain schools where in order to be admitted, the student had to be able to speak and understand standard English so they were called 'English standard schools' and then at one point after the war when a lot of the Nisei soldiers came back and got into the territorial legislature, they said, "Oh, this is racist. We can't have that." So they abolished that system but I think my older sister was the last one to get into that system. The quality was still fairly good, we went to schools that had only recently been English standard schools so a lot of the better teachers were there. My parents could have sent us to private schools but said it was better to go to a public school because we would be associating with many different kinds of people as we grew older so it was better to go to a public school and get accustomed to it. There was a great deal of racial diversity; Japanese American, Chinese American, Korean American, Filipino American and lots of Portuguese. Interestingly, Portuguese were considered a separate group. You could have any number of Europeans, especially from northern Europe who would all be termed 'haole,' and as Paul Theroux noted, the word 'haole' is seldom uttered without a modifier.

Gradually I figured out that if I spoke pidgin at school I would not get beaten up regularly for being a snob, so I learned to speak pidgin.

At the time pineapple and sugar were still dominant industries. The military was also fairly important there during the Cold War. Tourism was just starting to develop. When I was really small, there were really only five major hotels in Waikiki and you could go down there on Sunday and find a place to park and go to Waikiki Beach. Plenty of open space.

The tourists all came over on one of the Matson Liners, either the Matsonia or the Lurline, which was how we came over in '51, a four day voyage from San Francisco. It kept a lot of the riff raff out because it would take 14 hours on a propeller plane, so very few people came by plane. A couple of things that really changed Hawaii were statehood and the Boeing 707, because once people could come over on a jet, pretty much anybody could come over. Let's just say it lowered the tone of the islands, according to the viewpoint of many people.

Q: As a kid, how did you find elementary school?

CUSHING: It was OK. I learned to read in kindergarten. I taught myself to read by reading billboards and signs and menus and things. When I was a kid I used to spread out the Ithaca Journal and crawl all over it reading it on the living room floor. My grandmother was visiting once and said, "Isn't that cute? He's pretending he can read the paper." My dad said, "He's not pretending. He's reading the paper."

When I got into first grade, Mrs. Hanes, the first grade teacher, sent a rather curt note to my parents saying, "We prefer to teach the children how to read using our own methodology and we do not appreciate the fact that you have already taught your child to read." My father wrote back a note that said, "We didn't teach him. He taught himself."

Q: As a kid in elementary school, do you recall were there any sort of books that you particularly enjoyed reading?

CUSHING: We had a series of books called My Book House and they had different fairy tales in them and we read a lot of Little Golden Books. We read The Little Engine That Could and the Little Toot the Tugboat and my parents got us some books by Holling Clancy Holling, who was a very good illustrator. Paddle to the Sea was about this wooden canoe that went down the river from Canada. Pagoo was about a hermit crab and Minn of the Mississippi was about a turtle and The Tree in the Trail was about a cottonwood tree on the Santa Fe Trail and what happened to it over many generations.

My father also got a set of The World Book Encyclopedia so I would often pull down a copy of the World Book and read an article that caught my attention and it would say see also this or this so I'd put that volume back and get out another volume and start reading that. So I sort of read my way through The World Book Encyclopedias. I read some Jules Verne, read Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. I guess that's pretty much it for the time I was pretty small.

Q: How did you find school? Were you a good student? Were there some subjects you had problems with?

CUSHING: When I transferred from Aliiolani to Manoa Elementary, they originally put me in a mid-level third grade class and they gave me a book to read and I read, at natural speed, "Wow. Look at Spot run. That dog surely can run fast. Sally said, "Come back, Spot. You are running too fast." And the kids would say, "Slow down, slow down. We don't know what you are reading." Then some other kid would read, "Run, (pause) Spot, (pause) run. My, (pause) that (pause) dog (pause) certainly (pause) can (pause) run (pause) fast." So I was transferred to the best third class but they had already formed their own clique going back to kindergarten so I was a new white kid coming in, in the middle of the school year as I recall. I had already developed a crush on this Portuguese girl name Stephanie Teves who was in the original third grade class into which I was put and the kids in the best third grade class were really mean. One day I wrote a note to the teacher saying, "Everybody is mean to me in this particular class. I want to go back to the class where I was before." So I gave her the note and ran away.

The next day I was sent up to the principal's office and told to sit and wait but I never actually saw the principal. I was then told I could go back to class, so I presume that while I was away the teacher told all the other kids in the class that they had to start to make more of an effort to bring me into the class and stop being mean. Things gradually got smoothed over.

Q: Let's talk a little about in these early times. Was this a particularly Hawaiian neighborhood or was this a mixed neighborhood or what?

CUSHING: Manoa Valley, no. The traditional Hawaiians had been decimated by disease and had been pushed out to the fringes. They had public housing where a number of Hawaiian or part Hawaiian families lived, but in that particular neighborhood, one neighbor was Mrs. Randall and the other house was Mr. and Mrs. Tavares. They were of Portuguese descent but he was a judge and very well respected. There was Mrs. Randall, a divorced woman with two sons on the other side and then Tim Togikawa, whose father, Japanese American, his father was an optometrist. Below that was Mr. Carlson who was a veteran of the Navy in the Second World War. It was mixed white and Asian American, Japanese and so forth.

At the northern end of the valley, near the mountains, there were still truck farmers. There were some Filipinos who would grow lettuce and vegetables and things and bring them down to the markets. That is long gone but when I was young, the paved road ended at Manoa Elementary School and that continued as a dirt road for some several miles and there were lots of truck farms up there, and some horse stables near the big Chinese Cemetery.

Q: Where did you fit in the class structure? Your father working for the Institute, did this put him up a little higher up in the pecking order or what?

CUSHING: Yes, he eventually became a member of the Board of Regents of the University of Hawaii and then was chairman of the Board of Regents. He was active in the Hawaii Historical Society. I didn't know it at the time but the house we bought in 1953 was built in 1910. It had very high ceilings and had very nice architecture. It was originally built for a minister. It was a very spacious house, a nice big yard with an elephant ear tree, monkey pod tree, a mango tree, a papaya tree, breadfruit tree, hibiscus bushes, a couple of plumeria trees. I didn't realize it at the time but I expect we were upper middle class.

Q: You as a kid, there was a change. I grew up in the period where when school was over, mother would say, "OK, we have dinner at such and such a time and just go out and play and don't come back until 6:30" or something like that and the other kids were doing the same.

CUSHING: We did the same thing. After I had finally learned to ride a bike, I'd just say, "I'm going up the valley" and just tool around here and there and maybe stop in at one of the stores and read comic books or buy some bubble gum or something. No, there wasn't anything, no strict supervision at all. It was just like, they wanted to have a rough idea where we were but it was just like, be back at this time. There was not a lot of nervousness about where kids were.

Q: Or the scheduling of Little League and that sort of stuff.

CUSHING: Nothing like that.

Q: Well, then middle school?

CUSHING: Junior high school, seventh, eighth and ninth, Robert Louis Stevenson Junior High School.

That school drew from various other elementary school districts so it was a little bit tougher crowd because some of the other elementary schools that fed that school came from Pauoa Valley which was kind of a slightly lower class, kind of the farther west you got in Honolulu, the lower class the people were, and there was a public housing settlement near the school. Pauoa Valley was to a certain extent a Japanese American neighborhood but when you got west of downtown, then you started to get a lot of Samoans and Portuguese and so forth. The middle class Portuguese all went to St. Louis, which was a Catholic private high school. So junior high school was a little bit tougher, yes.

Q: How did you fit into that?

CUSHING: I tried to keep a low profile, which was hard because I was the tallest kid in the class. I stuck around with the kids from the same elementary school, Manoa, and I was in the highest level of all the classes so as I recall, it was neither pleasant nor unpleasant; I just kind of put in my time. I had a seventh grade teacher whom I didn't like very much and unfortunately, I had her for three periods of the day. My parents told me to stop talking back to her and just do whatever she said. She was mean, she was a real bitch, but I survived.

Q: Were you essentially a good student?

CUSHING: Reasonably good, yes.

Q: Did you get involved in any extracurricular things?

CUSHING: No, not that I recall.

Q: What about at home, up through junior high? Did you have brothers, sisters?

CUSHING: I had a sister three years older, born in 1942 and a younger brother born in 1947. My sister had her own room and then when she went away to college I finally got to have that room. Even though it was a spacious house, the way it was laid out, my brother and I had to share a room so we'd get into disagreements about this and that. At one point my dad came in with a roll of masking tape and he put a line of masking tape right down the middle of the room and he said, "John, this is your half. You may cross Jim's half on your way to your half but you may not linger there. Jim, put your stuff here. John, put your stuff here. Leave each other's stuff alone."

Q: As a kid growing up how was family time? Did you sit around and talk about things at the dinner table or not?

CUSHING: Yes, we all talked. My father subscribed to the Saturday Review and the Reporter and Life and the Saturday Evening Post and so he would occasionally bring an article to the dinner table and read it and we'd be asked to comment on it. We talked about current events and things like that. My mother had a rule that we could not talk about physiological functions at the dinner table and if we strayed into that area she would say, "I thought we had an understanding that physiology was not to be brought up at the dinner table."

Q: Where did your family fit politically?

CUSHING: I expect they probably voted for Eisenhower and I suspect my dad probably voted for Nixon in 1960, not very enthusiastically. He just said he was not quite as bad as Kennedy. My mom, whenever she came back from voting and I'd say, "Who'd you vote for?" She'd say, "None of your business."

Q: What about religion? How religious was your family or was it?

CUSHING: We started out going to Central Union Congregational Church and my sister finished up there through high school mostly because she had friends there but when the Unitarian Church came to the Islands and was established, we gravitated to the Unitarian Church although my mother lost her faith when she was on the verge of death back in 1951. She lost a fourth child due to eclampsia and the doctor asked my dad what do you want to do? If we abort this fetus that is almost full term, we might save your wife. If we wait we are probably going to lose them both, so she survived but later had epilepsy related to the eclampsia. I asked her about religion and she said, "Well, at the time that I was pretty sure I was going to die, I found religion to be of no comfort whatsoever." My father was a rationalist and so he had no belief in God or an afterlife as far as I can tell. They went to church mostly because there were a lot like minded people there who were either extremely liberal Unitarians or agnostics who went there for the intellectual discussion and friendship and so forth.

Q: I remember the definition of a Unitarian is they believe in one god at most.

We are moving up through the end of junior high. Were there any other sort of forces playing on you and your family at the time, either in Hawaii or interests or news?

CUSHING: I guess statehood was a big deal in 1959. They let us all out of school early when Congress voted to admit Hawaii as a state and had celebrations and this, that and the other because prior to that, if I had a pen pal from the mainland, he would write, "Do you live in a grass hut? Do you dance the hula? Do you have cars? How is it that you are able to write to me in English?" Often I would send away a coupon from a comic book for the flash Gordon decoder ring or the Buck Rogers ray gun or something and it would come back and say, "We do not accept orders from outside the continental United States." They would bounce it back. It was Honolulu, TH, Territory of Hawaii. We had no representative to Congress, I guess we had a delegate to Congress but he couldn't vote or say much of anything. It was sort of a feeling of second class citizenship that statehood helped to alleviate. Statehood was a big deal. Other than that, I honestly can't recall.

Q: Did you pick up any feeling at the time towards the Japanese American because they were the one major, rather large group, weren't they? They were distinct in a way?

CUSHING: Yes.

Q: How stood things that you picked up?

CUSHING: The Nisei veterans that came back from war got into politics. They kind of got a lock on the teaching profession. They got into the educational administration so large numbers of the women became elementary school teachers.

Q: Parallel to the New York Jewish experience.

CUSHING: I guess. They really did get a lock on it. There were a few, very few, haoles and a few Chinese Americans but a large number of the teachers were Japanese American. They were middle class. The barbers were all Japanese American women. They ran these small noodle shops. There is a type of noodle called saimin which is very popular there. There used to be a lot of little neighborhood restaurants that would serve saimin and barbecued beef or pork and macaroni salad, rice, the typical Hawaiian lunch.

They got into politics, they got into legislature. I think after statehood our first senators were Hiram Fong who was Chinese, and war veteran Daniel Inouye.

The Chinese were a smaller group but I think were generally considered to be more astute at business, more aggressive, tighter family structure and so forth but the Japanese Americans were seen as middle class strivers.

Q: Were the American missionaries a group that had any power by that time or was that pretty much over?

CUSHING: No, that was done. I guess their descendants have done pretty well. There was a fellow named Bishop who married a Hawaiian princess and got a huge parcel of land, Bishop Estate. The income from those lands funded a school. It said in the bequeathal, "a school for the children of Hawaii," so there's this big discussion of what it meant, who the children of Hawaii were and so I think you had to be of at least one quarter Hawaiian by blood to go there. The Kamehameha School was private schools for children of at least partial Hawaiian ancestry.

Q: One hears a lot about Punahou. Was that?

CUSHING: Punahou, which President Obama attended, was the arch rival of Roosevelt High School. It began as a school for missionaries' kids, I guess. I was in a rather anomalous position at Roosevelt because there were very few white kids in the public schools who were not military, who were from local families, "local" being a term for established in the islands, although actually local often means not haole. Local could mean Samoan or Portuguese or Hawaiian.

At any rate, Punahou was virtually all white kids unless someone was a very gifted athlete, at which point he would be poached from whatever other school he went to and given an athletic scholarship. Their football team and their other sports teams had kids of all different ethnicities but the regular student body was pretty much white.

Q: You went to high school where?

CUSHING: I went to Theodore Roosevelt High School which was about six blocks west of Punahou.

Q: You went there for a full four years?

CUSHING: Junior high school was seventh, eighth and ninth so I did tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades there. We had compulsory ROTC in tenth and eleventh grade. We had to wear a uniform and drill every Tuesday and have a parade. Once a month we had a dress parade and we had to wear a long sleeved khaki shirt with a black tie and creased khaki pants and our shoes had to be spit shined and our brass buckle and collar tabs had to be shined. If we loosened our tie or loosened our collar during any one of the classes during the day, the teachers were required to report us to the ROTC instructors and we would get demerits. If we got a certain number of demerits, we could not pass the class and if you had not passed two years of ROTC, you couldn't graduate. We were taught either by veterans of the Pacific War or the Korean War and we learned how to drill, we learned the manual of arms, using M-1 Garand rifles, with no firing pins and we watched old training films from the Second World War on bayonet fighting and tactical maneuvering and all sorts of stuff like that.

Q: Did many of the kids go into the military?

CUSHING: They did go into the army, just about the time of the Vietnam War, yes. Hawaii was quite pro military. I think there was the stigma of, potential disloyalty because Pearl Harbor happened there. There were so many Japanese Americans that they could not be interned or anything although a number of them were arrested and interrogated and so forth. But of course, they had the 442nd regiment and the 100th battalion that served with distinction in the European Theater. It was pro military in the abstract, but at the same time the white soldiers, sailors and Marines from the Marine Airbase could not get a date to save their lives because all of the local families said, "You will not under any circumstances date a white, military person from the mainland. You simply will not do this." White servicemen were looked upon with disdain but in the abstract, Hawaii was pro military.

Q: You had three years of high school. What subjects were you particularly concentrating on?

CUSHING: I had the first year of Latin in ninth grade. I had second year Latin in tenth grade and also started French. I went to summer school the summer of 1960 before tenth grade to take world history so I could take French and Latin at the same time. I had first year algebra in ninth grade. Algebra, geometry, physics and chemistry, I didn't do particularly well in. I had difficulty with them. I always did well in English, French, Latin, and history. In the summer school American history class in 1961 I'd take an exam, I'd get it back and if something were marked wrong, I'd go up to the teacher's desk and argue the point that she had not considered this and that and she would change my grade. I was not very good in math and science. I passed them but not with any flying colors.

Q: How about extracurricular activities?

CUSHING: Ran track and cross country.

Q: What was sort of the spirit getting towards the end of high school? Get the hell out of Hawaii, see the rest of the world or how did you feel about it?

CUSHING: I was a little bit apprehensive. I was kind of reluctant to apply to schools up on the mainland. I thought, "Gee, I don't know. It's awfully big. Maybe I'll just go to the University of Hawaii" but my parents empathically said no. The University of Hawaii is a second rate school. You are not going to go there so I eventually applied to Reed College and was accepted there.

Q: Reed is in?

CUSHING: Portland, Oregon.

Q: An excellent school.

CUSHING: I was originally a little apprehensive about leaving but as an ultimatum my folks said, "You will go to school up on the mainland. You are not going to stick around here."

Q: One thing you haven't mentioned at all. You are on this island. What about surfing and swimming and all?

CUSHING: I enjoyed skin diving at Hanauma Bay; before it became a protected wild life resort you could go and spear fish if you wanted to and you could pitch a tent on the beach, go out and spear a fish and then cook it up on a wood fire or charcoal fire for dinner. We used to picnic on the beach. My father had a little charcoal stove called a hibachi and so we would grill up something for a picnic lunch or picnic dinner. I didn't do a lot of big board surfing but I did a lot of body board surfing with a short board, a board about two thirds the length of this table.

Q: You were at Reed from when to when?

CUSHING: I was at Reed from September, '63 to May of '67 and in the summers I came back and worked in a pineapple cannery.

Q: Let's talk about Reed. This was '63 to '67? Was either of two movements going around sort of the rebellion of youth and free speech? Was that taking root? And then the Vietnam War. Were those movements going on?

CUSHING: Not initially, no. The first big shock was when John Kennedy was assassinated in November of '63. I was just a couple of months into my freshman year. The free speech movement, I guess started at Berkeley in '64 but Reed already had a tradition of open academic inquiry and so forth. All behavior at Reed between faculty and students was based on what they called the honor principle which as the typical honor system; you wouldn't cheat on an exam, you wouldn't lie, you wouldn't steal. Don't lie, don't cheat, don't steal and also part of the honor system was you were not to say or do anything that offended anyone else. If someone else felt offended he could go to the honor board and bring an honor case against you and this would be heard and either upheld or dismissed. I never served on the honor board.

I had one honor case brought against me along with about 400 other people because the day the old commons closed down, there was an enormous food fight. They decided that to celebrate the closing of the commons, there would be a food fight and so everybody who didn't want to be in the food fight ate early because commons was open from 4:30 until 6:00, but sometime between 5:30 and 6:00, people started throwing food. I was working in the dish room at the time so from the dish room I was spraying people with the dishwashing hose. Other people were spooning mayonnaise from the salad bar on people and one fellow was shooting milk out of a cardboard milk dispenser. So it was an unholy mess and then at the end of it, we began cleaning up. We got out mops and brooms and things but the manager of the commons came and screamed at all of us to get out. She had it professionally cleaned and somehow got the names of all 400 people that had been involved in the food fight and we were all listed as honor violators and were assessed \$3.00 each toward the cost of the professional cleaning. That was my one violation there.

Q: At Reed, it has a reputation of high academic standards. Did you find that you were sort of in a different league?

CUSHING: Oh, yes. It didn't take long before I concluded that I had been admitted by mistake. The first year was humanities. We started out with the Odyssey and went through Plato and Aristotle and Lucretius and Seneca and on into Christianity and so forth. And then we went from the Enlightenment to Shakespeare and Milton and just all the way on up through Sartre so I guess so we had a very comprehensive survey of western civilization, starting from Homer and going all the way through the 20th Century. We had humanities lectures three days a week and we had conferences a couple of days a week also, small group conferences and very combative discussions about the material. We had to write numerous papers also, humanities papers on a certain topic. It was extremely rigorous. I had humanities, I had beginning French and I had biology and I had a music course, history of music.

Q: So many universities and colleges had sort of a Marxist tinge to some of the courses. Was that at Reed at all?

CUSHING: No, there were a lot of red diaper babies from the big cities in the East, Jewish kids whose parents had been what they called 'parlor pinks' so there was a lot of Marxist mindset among the students there but I don't think it seeped into the curriculum all that much.

Q: What about the Cold War? How much were you getting? Was the Cold War something of consideration while you were at Reed?

CUSHING: No, the main thing I remember about that was the Cuban missile crisis in October of '62 when we were seniors in high school. That was a big deal. Reed existed in sort of an intellectual bubble. There was a lot of work on civil rights a bit later. The summer between my freshman and sophomore years the Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee was active; a lot of the students went down to Mississippi in the summer of '64 to register voters and we did a lot of marching for civil rights and meetings and rallies and so forth. We marched against the McCarran Act in the spring of '64. Everybody worked very enthusiastically for Lyndon Johnson's election in November of '64 because the alternative was Goldwater but then within a few months they were condemning him for escalating the war in Vietnam.

I think there were three people on the entire campus who were Republicans and they would have Goldwater bumper stickers on their bicycles and their bicycles would be vandalized because they had Goldwater stickers on them. It was pretty much faux left wing. I don't think there was much thought behind it; it was sort of the default position to be what was considered liberal just because it was socially unacceptable to be much of anything else.

The Vietnam War became a big topic from the fall of '64 the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and so forth, right after Johnson was elected and then all the rest of the time I was there, there were demonstrations against the Vietnam War; marches and teach-ins and things like that.

Q: Were you looking at studies in any particular area of the world?

CUSHING: I majored in English and French literature and as part of Humanities 110 and 210, we studied European civilization and history and then I took a couple of courses in American intellectual history so we started with the Puritans and worked our way all the way through Emerson, Thoreau, but it was more intellectual history than political or sociological history.

Q: While you were at Reed, did the Foreign Service ever come across your radar?

CUSHING: No, not in the slightest. I knew that Dean Rusk was the secretary of state. When I was a kid I knew that John Foster Dulles was the secretary of state and then he died of cancer and Christian Herter was the secretary of state. No, not in the slightest.

Q: What were you pointed towards? Professor like your father?

CUSHING: I had no idea. I joined the Peace Corps out of college because I had no idea what I wanted to do.

Q: What were the dating habits, practices at Reed in that era?

CUSHING: Folk dancing was big I guess because a lot of the kids were Jewish. Israeli folk dancing was really big. They would have folk dances in the student union and play all these records and there was homebrew; some people brewed homebrew.

The dorms had visiting hours. I think on week nights between 4:30 and 7:30 guys and girls could go into each other's dorm rooms. During the weekend I think it was from 2 pm to 9 pm or something. There were dorm mothers that sort of kept an eye on the upper class women.

Years later I learned at a reunion that the girls would make these charts on butcher paper with markers about who had slept with whom and like how everybody was related in terms of with whom they had had sexual relations and so forth. I was either studying or listening to blues records or playing touch football.

Q: So you graduated in '67?

CUSHING: Yes.

Q: What did you do?

CUSHING: Joined the Peace Corps.

Q: What made you do that?

CUSHING: Didn't want to go to graduate school. I was exhausted. I had a very long year writing my senior thesis and I also played in a rock band when I was at Reed. We used to play at dances at the student union and sometimes we'd play gigs downtown Portland also.

Q: What instrument?

CUSHING: I played the harmonica and tambourine, sometimes the upright piano, sometimes a rhythm guitar.

Q: How about the draft status? What was the situation?

CUSHING: I was 2-S and then at one point they had this rule that in order to keep your 2-S status you had to pass an intelligence exam and I and a number of other people decided that was classist because only upper class kids would be able to pass the intelligence exam to maintain our student deferment so instead of taking the exam, in protest I went over to another college where they were giving the exam and attempted to hand out very turgid and poorly written propaganda material that someone had given us and the people to whom we handed it out ripped it up and threw it at us because they had taken the exam very seriously. Yes, it was a student deferment.

Q: Could you go into the Peace Corps without getting drafted?

CUSHING: I had just started Peace Corps training in the summer of 1967 when I got a notice to report for my pre-induction physical but the Peace Corps wrote a letter to them and said this fellow is already in Peace Corps so they gave me a deferral for Peace Corps service and then, by the end of my second year in Peace Corps they had instituted the lottery and my number was 331 and they never got to that number so I was fine.

Q: Peace Corps; when you signed up for it could you name where you wanted to go or how did it work?

CUSHING: Somebody actually came to the Reed campus and gave the Modern Language Aptitude Test. Because I had a high score, they sent me a pack of material asking me if I wanted to go to South Korea and I said, "Yeah, sure" so I did. We trained at this ski resort up in Pennsylvania, Blue Knob. Trained from July of '67 to early October and then went off to Korea.

Q: You were in Korea from when to when?

CUSHING: I was in Korea from October 13th, 1967 to about July 30th of 1970. I extended for a year.

Q: Where did you go in Korea?

CUSHING: I was in the town of Wonju which was southeast of Seoul, about 80 miles or so. It was just at the beginning of a fairly extensive mountain range that ran down the entire spine of the peninsula.

Q: What were you doing?

CUSHING: I was teaching English at a junior high school. I taught English classes there.

Q: How did you find Korea and the Koreans?

CUSHING: Very cold, freezing winters. The Koreans were quite interested in the United States. I think there was some residual bitterness about the fact they had been divided and the war and so forth but also there was gratitude that the United States had saved them from being entirely communized. They were very ambivalent, very ambivalent but I lived with a very nice family. The husband was a teacher at the same school where I was and he rented me a separate little one-room house.

I almost died of carbon monoxide poisoning after I had been there a little while. I bought a charcoal burning stove to keep the place a little warmer than the ondol floor but one night I went out to a Chinese restaurant with a bunch of other teachers and drank a whole bunch of pegal, very strong alcohol, came back and left the stove on all night as usual and about 2 in the morning had a splitting headache so I pushed open the door and pushed my head out of the door and through to the courtyard and decided this is kind of nice, this cold air so I think I will just leave my head out here in the cold air and then next morning took apart the stove and found out the pipe had been completely gunked up so if I had not awoken with a splitting headache, and had not pushed my head outside, I would have probably just expired from the carbon monoxide.

Q: That killed a lot of people.

CUSHING: It did, about 2,000 people a year died because of cracks in the ondol floors.

Q: How did you find the educational system there?

CUSHING: Very rigorous. Education was in high demand. The junior highs had an entrance exam and not everyone got in. The kids all wore black uniforms, student uniforms, sort of military style, modeled after the Japanese school uniform with the caps. In the summer they wore lighter trousers and a white short sleeved shirt. They were not allowed to do anything except go to school and go home and study. They were not allowed into movie theaters while wearing their uniforms unless it was a school approved movie. Then they could all go. It was a very rigid hierarchy. The principal was sort of the god of the school and the vice principal was the enforcer and then there was a department chairman for mathematics and social studies and English and so forth.

I recall they had a specific class in anti-Communism at the time. They taught anti-Communism as a subject and they would have anti-Communist speech contests and anti-Communist poster contests and anti-Communist essay contests and any number of things.

Q: Did you get any feel for Park Chung Hee and his rule there?

CUSHING: The thing about Park Chung Hee was what I encountered later with the Shah of Iran; hang the photograph of him on your wall and don't bring him up at all. Make sure you have his photograph prominently displayed somewhere and don't talk about him. Just do not talk about him, period.

Q: This was a period where they were making quite an effort to allow people coming from more agricultural communities which I assume yours was, to benefit whereas so often governments will make the farmers bring their produce in and give them a low rate so let the city populace have cheap bread and Park Chung Hee was not doing that.

CUSHING: No. I think he wanted Korea to work toward self sufficiency in agriculture. Actually the first family I lived with, the father took an examination and was able to get a position in Seoul, so I lived with them from October to about January of '68 and they moved away to Seoul so then I lived in sort of a boarding house from February to about July and then in July of '68 I moved to a farming village about five miles outside out of town. I lived with Korean farmers in a mud walled, thatch roofed farmhouse. We got water from the well, had no electricity. It was a very interesting way to live. All the food came from the farm. They had rice fields, they had vegetable gardens. We had kimchi and tofu and in the summer we had corn and potatoes and fresh vegetables. It was excellent food.

Q: How did you feel about kimchi?

CUSHING: Oh, I liked it, still like it.

We had a conference up in Seoul in January of '68 and about two days prior to the seizure of the Pueblo a team of North Korean commandos came down to assassinate Park Chung Hee. I happened to be hiking on the same mountain ridge as these 31 North Korean commandos so I was hiking along and was on my way back down when this ROK helicopter came by at a very low level bristling with guns and they motioned for me to go back up to the top of the ridge so I did. They had rounded up all the hikers and had them all in a group surrounded by these gun packing soldiers and they screened each person and they saw that I was obviously an American so they said, "Get off the mountain." I said, "Sir. That's exactly what I am going to do. Goodbye," and I left. That night we were at Academy House in Su Yu Li, which was on the outskirts of Seoul at the time and there was a gun battle in the mountains up above so we all got up on the roof and watched the tracers and the flares and the mortar rounds and what not.

Q: Korea, they had a curfew every night.

CUSHING: They did. It was a good excuse to stop drinking.

Q: I was consul general there from '76 to '79 and we loved the curfew because it meant our kids had to be home and we didn't have to stay too long at parties.

CUSHING: Exactly. There's always this big scramble about 11:30 at night. Everybody's jamming to get into a taxicab and the cab driver would say, "I can't take you, it's too far. I can't get back to my garage before curfew." Sometimes the hardcore drinkers would just sleep under the tables at the bars.

Q: How did you find teaching?

CUSHING: It was good. The kids were very diligent. There were an awful lot of them. They didn't light the stove until November 1 and they took the stove out on March 15th. It got plenty cold before November 1st and it was still pretty cold after March 15th. I would wear long underwear and a wool shirt and sweater just to try to keep warm.

Q: Were you teaching only boys or girls?

CUSHING: I was at Wonju Middle School from '67 to '69, which was a boys' middle school and then I did one more year at a small Catholic school that was coeducational. It was about 45 boys in a class and 15 girls. They sat the girls up front so the boys wouldn't pester them, I guess.

Q: I know this from Seoul. The students would come to class and then they would, particularly by the time they got around to high school and then they would be expected to go home and study for another three or four hours with their parents helping them. They didn't fool around.

CUSHING: That was pretty much it. Once kids got out of school, it was take your books and go home and study. Some of the teachers made extra money by doing private tutoring at night. They would go to different kid's houses and study, help them study.

Q: Did you have much social life with your fellow teachers?

CUSHING: I'd go out drinking from time to time. I wasn't much of a drinker. I would go out and drink with them from time to time but sometimes we'd go on hikes together. We'd have a school hike. On Arbor Day all the kids would have to go up in the mountains and plant a tree. During school vacations I did a lot of traveling around on my own. I liked to just get on a bus and go; the roads were almost all dirt and the buses were converted army trucks. They just hammered some sheet metal over the bed of an army truck and threw in some benches and that would be a bus. The trains were very slow but that was pretty much the only way around, by train or very primitive bus. The road from Seoul to Chunchon was paved because it was considered a military road and from Chunchon to Wonju it was paved. From Wonju to Seoul through Yeoju was all dirt and everything south of Seoul was all dirt and east of Wonju was dirt.

It is kind of ironic because now, because of the traffic jams if you are on a bus trying to get back to Seoul on Sunday night it can take you five hours. I would be telling the younger people in Wonju, "You know, when I was your age, it would take you five hours to get from Wonju to Seoul on a bus." They'd say, "Yes, it still takes five hours on a bus." If the highway is clear it is about an hour and twenty minutes.

In the summer of '68 one of my students had an older brother who was a Buddhist monk so he asked if I would like to travel around with him. So in the summer of '68 this Buddhist monk and I traveled to a whole bunch of different temples all over Korea and stayed at temples, which was nice. Traveled with him on the train and bus and went to He In Sa, which is where they have all the woodblock prints that we saw, went to temples in Chinju and in Masan and Pusan, a number of places.

Q: Did you have any contact with the embassy?

CUSHING: They tried to keep a very strict wall between Peace Corps and the embassy, although every time a new Peace Corps group arrived, the North Korean radio would say, "Another group of nefarious American spies has just landed in occupied Korea" and then they'd read all our names, so somehow the North Koreans got a list of all the names of the Peace Corps volunteers.

Q: Were you at all interested in the Foreign Service?

CUSHING: We'd go to the USOM (US Overseas Mission) cafeteria, which was near Kyung Bok Palace. It used to be the Overseas Mission; it is now the embassy building. We'd go to the cafeteria because we could get grilled cheese sandwiches and hamburgers there.

I took the Foreign Service exam for the first time in the cafeteria of the U.S. Overseas Mission in late 1969, I believe. One of the other Peace Corps volunteers had already been accepted into the Foreign Service and got a deferral to do Peace Corps for a couple of years before he went in.

From my Peace Corps group there were five who went in, I think before me. There is Leroy Norton who eventually ended up in economics and the Foreign Commercial Service, mostly in Australia and New Zealand. Doug McNeal, Leroy Norton, Russ Sveda, Mark Mohr and Dick Christenson. I joined considerably later than everybody else. Mark had already gotten in in '67 but he didn't have actually start until '69. Dick got in I think in '73, Doug McNeal maybe in '70 or '71 and Leroy Norton about that time too and Russ Sveda probably not much later.

Q: How did you find Korean?

CUSHING: The language?

Q: Yes.

CUSHING: I wasn't a particularly good student during the training but once, especially once I was out living on the farm and there was nobody for miles who spoke English, my Korean got quite a bit better.

Q: Did you find sort of the class structure of Korean, you use a different form depending on whom you are talking to. I suppose in a farm community you don't get involved in as many of the you might say, the niceties, did you?

CUSHING: No, they just spoke low form the whole time.

One of the things that was extremely striking was that virtually all the young men were in uniform and carrying a weapon so it was not uncommon to be riding on a bus with a soldier who was carrying an M-1 rifle or an M-1 carbine or something. The same thing with the train; they had their weapons and helmets with them at all times. I guess it was standard procedure.

Q: They took the whole thing very seriously and rightly so. This was not a minor exercise.

CUSHING: Following the assassination attempt on Park Chung Hee the Pueblo was seized two days later and then in either late '68 or early '69 there were 120 North Korean commandos landed on the east coast and it took months to hunt all of them down. As a matter of fact, they originally estimated they had 120 commandos but they ended up with more than 120 bodies because if they caught a South Korean out after curfew, they would shoot him and count him as one of the commandos.

Q: Koreans are rough.

CUSHING: Yes. The other thing they had was the Ye Bi Gun, which was sort of like National Guard, composed of army veterans. They had these uniforms and they'd keep all the carbines locked up at the police station or the local armory or something and if there were a rumor of a spy or guerrillas in the mountains or something, they'd call out the Ye Bi Gun from that village and arm them and send them all up into the hills.

Q: Were you getting any news or was there much talk about the Korean division in Vietnam?

CUSHING: We were told not to talk about that. Occasionally we would go to a bar and we would meet a Korean soldier who had served in Vietnam. They would talk a little bit about it. They would talk about how much tougher the Korean soldiers were than the Americans, how it took more bullets to kill a Korean than an American and so forth.

Q: The Koreans had quite a reputation in Vietnam for not taking any crap. I think the Viet Cong particularly left them alone.

CUSHING: Pretty much, yes.

Q: What had inspired you to take the Foreign Service exam?

CUSHING: One of the people I roomed with during Peace Corps training had already taken the Foreign Service exam and had been admitted. That was Mark Mohr and I thought, well, living overseas here in Korea is pretty interesting and if I were to get into the Foreign Service eventually I would be able to live in lots of different countries and learn different languages and so forth.

Q: So you got out in '69, was it?

CUSHING: I extended until July of '70.

Q: And then what?

CUSHING: Then I got a master's of arts in teaching from the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont. It was an offshoot of the Experiment in International Living so I did a one year's master's program which included a home stay and teaching in Mexico. At that point I learned Spanish.

Q: Compare and contrast Mexico and Korea.

CUSHING: Mexico was a little more laid back. The thing I noticed there was they had a very balanced view of how much you should work and how much you should relax. Korea was striving to catch up or to, well, at first just to rebuild from the war, I suppose. It was a very hard scrabble society when I was there in Peace Corps so I guess the central unit was the family and you know, maybe your classmates or something but essentially it was every man for himself. You had to work really hard. You had to study hard. The farmers worked hard, the people in the factories worked hard, the soldiers trained hard. There is something about having a cold winter that keeps your mind focused on your work whereas in Mexico, they were nice people. They were pretty laid back.

Q: Where was your school?

CUSHING: I did a home stay in San Luis Potosi and then I taught for a couple of months in Orizaba. San Luis Potosi is north of Mexico City. Orizaba is southeast of Mexico City, between Puebla and Veracruz.

Q: How did you find the students?

CUSHING: Pretty good. I was teaching at a private academy, an English academy so the students were all motivated to study. They had all paid their own money to go and study there. It was OK.

Q: What were you doing with the Foreign Service?

CUSHING: Well, at that point I passed the written exam and I eventually ended up coming down to Rosslyn, I think it was January of '71 and I failed the oral. At that time it wasn't the group exercise. It was just one guy with a board of inquisitors and they asked me a whole bunch of stuff. I didn't know very much of it and so at the end of it there was one guy sitting there who said, "I am astounded at how poorly you did" and then he left.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions?

CUSHING: It was January, 1971. They said, "Name the major geopolitical trouble spots of the next decade." And they asked how I thought the war in Vietnam was going and that's pretty much all I remember.

Q: Did that turn you off?

CUSHING: Well, shoot. I didn't pass the oral. I put it out of my mind, I guess. I took it again, took the written in December of '73 in Tokyo and I passed it but I never got around to taking the orals because I would have had to go back to the States. I was living in Japan and working then. I took it Tehran in the fall of '75 and I missed passing the written exam by one point. I failed by one point. There was one question. There was a photograph of an urn and it said, is this a Greek, Roman or Etruscan urn? I guessed wrong so I failed the written by one point.

Q: How did you get yourself to these various places? What did you do?

CUSHING: After I got my master's of arts in teaching which included a home stay and practice teaching in Mexico, I went to work for a private English school in Japan in Chiba, which is kind of around the peninsula from Tokyo. Chiba is a port city and it has refineries and steel and this, that and the other, sort of industrial commercial city. It's all part of a big urban belt that goes all the way from Kawasaki to Tokyo and around to Chiba.

I lived in a little farming village. The director of one of the schools where I worked had a daughter who was married to the son of the village postmaster and they lived in the house connected to the post office in the village and they had an empty house up on the hill that was 350 years old, an enormous house with a thatched roof and tatami mats. He asked if I would be interested in renting that so I had an enormous old farmhouse that had about five or six large rooms to it. It had a crank telephone, had a well, and had a wood burning bathtub.

Q: How long did you do that?

CUSHING: I was there from August of '71 to about August of '74.

Q: What was the school like?

CUSHING: There actually were a couple of schools. There was one building in Inage, which was sort of a little suburb of Chiba, and then two stops down the rail line there was a rented space in a commercial building that had an office and a classroom and then on the next floor it had another classroom, so there were about three or four teachers there.

The students were mostly adults. They'd come in and study in the evening so the working hours were from 6 to 9 at night so you had the rest of the day off, not too shabby. I spent a lot of time during the day either reading or riding my motorcycle around.

Q: How was your Japanese?

CUSHING: Knowing Korean made it a lot easier to learn Japanese because the grammatical structure was quite similar and all the loan words from Chinese were exactly the same. You just had to learn how they pronounced them differently. Of course, in Japanese the Chinese character would also be used as the base of the verb but all the compound nouns and compound verbs were exactly the same. If one knew, especially if you knew the Chinese characters in Korean for the compound nouns and verbs that were loan words from Chinese, it was pretty easy to plug in the Japanese. I had a tutor. I'd stay after from 9 to 10 a couple of nights a week. I would study with a tutor in the office of the school.

Q: How were you received by the Japanese?

CUSHING: Whenever possible they tend to just politely ignore foreigners, pretend they aren't there. I got to know the folks in the village a bit. There was just one little store there and one little gasoline station with two pumps so I'd fill up the motorcycle there. There was a little general store that sold basic groceries and so forth, a very old, pre-war building and there was a barbershop and one little restaurant and a fish monger, the guy sold fish and that was it. They were OK. I didn't get to know a great number of Japanese people actually at the time.

Q: Did you feel you were having an interesting time but were you going anywhere?

CUSHING: One of fellow teachers was from my Peace Corps group, Korea III. He taught at the main school up in Tokyo and so I met one of his students and married her in the spring of 1973 and then our son was born very late in 1973. There was a fellow who had been there at the Inage school who was pushing 40. He said, "I've got to get out of here because otherwise I will be an English conversation teacher in Japan for the rest of my life" and there are people who do that. He said, "I've got to get out and do something else" so after our son was born, I also thought I really cannot stick around here forever. For one year I found work at a school in New Mexico. I taught in a Navajo community school. It was not a BIA school.

Q: Bureau of Indian Affairs.

CUSHING: Right. It was not a Bureau of Indian Affairs school. It wasn't on the reservation. It was on Navajo land but it was a community school. The school board was all parents of the kids and so we were there for a year and then went off to Iran to work.

Q: What was the background of your wife?

CUSHING: She came from a small town in the Japan Alps called Omachi. She had come to Tokyo to study English and she worked in a large night club as a pager. She was in charge of paging all the different hostesses when the customers came in so she had to memorize the call numbers of all the different hostesses. When a particular customer came in and wanted Cherry Blossom or Chrysanthemum or Rose or Peach Tree or whatever, she would have to page that person. Go to table five because your customer is here. She was a pager and a receptionist and during the day she studied English. So I met her that way.

Q: You were in Tehran from when to when?

CUSHING: I wasn't in Tehran; I was up in Rasht. I did a year at the Navajo school from August of '74 to July of '75. That was extremely isolated and very difficult for my wife, a very difficult introduction to the United States and so we heard that the School for International Training had a contract to teach the Iranian navy. This is rather convoluted. The Shah of Iran had bought these four Fletcher class destroyers from the U.S. Navy and in order for the Iranian crews to be trained to run them, they had to know English. The Shah, never doing anything halfway decided that every new recruit in the navy would learn English. So there was a navy language school in Rasht.

So the U.S. navy got the contract and then subcontracted it to the U.S. Army and the U.S. Army subcontracted it to the Defense Language Institute and the Defense Language Institute subcontracted it to the School for International Training.

So I heard about that and I signed up and we got accepted so we went off to Iran. After some ridiculous training at the Defense Language Institute at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, which was compulsory so we just suffered through that as best we could. I did get to see the Alamo anyway.

Then we were over in Rasht, Iran which is not too far from the Caspian Sea. That's where the main navy language school was.

The Shah had this idea you should teach every single kid coming into the navy English for three months, find the best students, send them to another school, up in Bandar Pahlavi (as it was called then) which was up the coast and then the best of those would be sent to Lackland Air Force Base near San Antonio Texas to take advanced language training, after which he would have enough crews to run the four destroyers and they would all know English and then they would be trained. So that was his idea. He never did anything halfway.

A similar story was he decided that every child in Iran should have a glass of milk once a day so he bought this enormous herd of cows from New Zealand. His advisors said, "Why don't we buy ten cows and bring them to Iran and see how they do?" He said, "No, no. Every kid in Iran needs to have a glass of milk once a day" so he bought these thousands of milk cows and they all died. He said, "These cows are no good. I'm not paying for them."

Q: So you were teaching navy people from when to when?

CUSHING: From August of '75 to the end of July, '77.

Q: What were you getting from this? You certainly had enough experience.

CUSHING: It was interesting to live in Iran. We traveled a bit, saw Isfahan, saw the ruins of Persepolis near Shiraz. It was quite interesting, actually.

Q: You were getting very close to the revolution there.

CUSHING: Yes.

Q: Were you picking up any indicators of that?

CUSHING: Yes. Three contractors in Tehran were killed by the mujaheddin. Actually, earlier I think they tried to kill the deputy chief of mission at the embassy. He was supposed to go somewhere but he didn't feel well so he sent an Iranian employee in his place so the Iranian got killed. Up in Rasht the police raided a house of a terrorist cell and got into a big gun battle with them and captured a number of them.

Also there was a hotel in Iran where we used to go to the lobby to drink beer and play chess. I wasn't there at the time but a terrorist came to the door with a hand grenade. He was going to throw it into the lobby but there was an off duty policeman who shot him just as he pulled the pin so the fellow dropped the primed grenade after being shot and blew himself up.

One of the Iranian teachers at the school was buying a pair of shoes and had just come out with this new pair of shoes and there was a gun fight right in front of the shoe store so as he was coming out of the door, this dead terrorist fell into his arms. So yes, things were popping.

The big riots in Tabriz began in March of '78 and we were already out of there by then.

Q: When you left in '77 did you have the feeling you wanted to get the hell out?

CUSHING: I thought two years was enough. The School for International Training contract ran only the first year and then there was a different group of sort of fly by nighters who took over the contract for the second year and they left, so it was going to be very extremely haphazardly run and I was going to be under the direct supervision of an extremely obnoxious and arrogant Iranian navy admiral, Admiral Faroktollah, and I thought, "I don't want to do this." He was a real shmuck. The Iranians tend to be very whiny and defensive and feel persecuted. I didn't want to be any part of that so I left.

They actually asked me to stay. They liked the work I was doing. I was a teacher the first year and then I was director the second year so I scheduled all the classes, assigned the teachers, supervised the exams, sent in the reports to the navy headquarters and so forth. They liked the work I was doing and they asked if I would stay but then this particular admiral said, "God damn it. Who asked Cushing to stay?" I was on my way out by then and I thought, no, I don't want to work for this guy.

Q: So what did you do? This is '77?

CUSHING: In '77 I got a job in the Tacoma public schools teaching in the bilingual education program. The friend who had introduced me to my wife in Japan had done a two year program in the writer's program at the University of Iowa and then ended up in Tacoma and then was the coordinator of the bilingual education program for southeastern Asian refugees. So we taught Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian refugee kids. He got me a position with the Tacoma public schools. So I did that.

Q: How did you work it when you get all these kids from Southeast Asia? Was there a common language you could start with?

CUSHING: We hired adult refugees who spoke English and Vietnamese or Cambodian or Laotian. One of the fellows I worked with was in the Vietnamese air force as a helicopter pilot. His English was pretty good. He was one of the paraprofessionals.

For the older kids we had a welcome center for kids I guess between the ages of 15 and 21 so we would start out with classes mostly in their languages and would gradually transition them into the regular mainstream curriculum.

The smaller kids they put them in the regular classroom a lot of the day and they picked up English pretty fast but we would have some classes with them during the day also.

Q: The Foreign Service, was it still out there as an option?

CUSHING: Sort of. What happened was I worked from '77 to '82 as a teacher and then the coordinator of the program, my Peace Corps friend, went off to work at the American International School in Lagos, Nigeria and so I became the acting coordinator while he was away. I did that for three years and I got involved in a very messy lawsuit. There was an extremely arrogant, incompetent, Latvian-American teacher who had been bounced out of the German department. He was teaching German but at the request of many parents, he was bounced out of there and so they sloughed him off into the bilingual program. I attempted to have him non-renewed for non performance. An arbitrator ruled that he was entitled to keep his job and so he then sued me for the intentional infliction of emotional distress. The Tacoma school board and I were codefendants in that. That trial lasted for months and months. They tried to buy out his contract and get him to drop the suit and so forth.

Eventually, the jury awarded him \$20,000 but concluded that because he had been uncooperative during the probation process, he was entitled only to 50% of that. They had offered him as much as \$500,000 to walk away but he ended up with \$10,000.

My favorite part was that the two attorneys on his side had made less that month than I did because they got one third of it, they got \$3,333 which they had to split. But that left a bad taste in my mouth.

I was back in the classroom because I was in the bad graces of Tacoma Public Schools, and was getting tired of what I had been doing and so my friend said, "Why don't you take the Foreign Service exam again?" So I thought, why not?

So I went up to Seattle to Pacific University in December of '86, took the written exam. It was a Saturday, no heat in the building. It was about 50 degrees, took the written exam, and passed it. Took the oral up in Seattle in May of '87, did the background check and medical and then early December of '87 got a call asking if I wanted to be in an A-100 class that would be forming up in February of 1988 so I said, "Sure." So I had to get the house organized, get the house ready to rent, pull our son out of school, quit my job, find homes for the cats, get the dog ready to go to Washington with us, gave away most of our furniture, sold the cars. All of this within the space of six weeks. It was a real crash program.

I got the news on December 5th. I had been out each time they called. The classroom had a phone but I had been elsewhere each time they called so finally about the third time they left a number, so I called the number back and a secretary at FSI who said, "Well, we were about ready to give up on you because you never answered the calls but would you like to be part of an A-100 class forming in February?" I said, "Sure."

So my wife quit her job, we gave away the cats, got the house ready to rent, sold the cars, gave away the furniture, shipped a few things to Washington and away we went.

Q: John, you say you have a couple of things you remembered about the oral and the written exam.

CUSHING: Yes. I took the written exam up in Seattle in December of 1986 at Seattle Pacific University in an unheated room. It was on a Saturday and the university turned the heat off for the weekend. It was about 50 degrees in there. I did the written exam as quickly as I could and I finished with about an hour to spare and walked up to the proctor to hand it in and she said, "You can't leave yet. There's still an hour left." I said, "Take it, I'm freezing, goodbye" and I walked out.

Well, I guess they graded it because I passed it and I got a notice to appear for the oral exam in May of 1987 and so I arrived, I believe it was at a hotel up in Seattle where they had set aside some rooms and there were two other young men and I and three women.

Prior to the exam I went to Nordstrom's and bought a very expensive tie and I took a suit up and wore it the morning of the exam. I was staying at a friend's house the night before the exam so I could get there fairly early. His wife saw me that morning wearing a suit and the expensive necktie and I had shined my shoes and she said, "You are going to pass the exam." I thought that was nice of her to say so I showed up at the exam and one of the other men had corduroy trousers and loafers and a tweed sport jacket and the other young man had a pair of blue jeans and a short sleeved shirt and a sweater vest and a leather jacket. The young women all had fairly informal clothes on too. I thought, "I guess I am a little bit ahead of the game."

I passed the oral exam. I assume it was because I was the only person who showed up dressed appropriately. I think they thought well, we need one person out of Seattle. Let's pick the guy who was wearing the suit.

Q: Do you remember any of the questions?

CUSHING: We had that inbox exercise. One of the fellows said OK, how is it we are running a current account deficit when we have a big trade deficit with Japan? The deficit with Japan was more than with China at that time. That was 1987 but inflation was not really that bad. So I cobbled together some sort of half baked explanation for that and we had the inbox exercise where you are in this provincial town where the consul general has just died of yellow fever so you have one hour to go through the inbox and write recommendations before the plane back to the capital leaves.

I did the inbox exercise and then we had the negotiation exercise and I volunteered to be the note taker for that and do the final report so I guess that got me extra points. I did notice that on a scale of one to ten, what they now call my emotional intelligence or EQ was 2.7, in other words willingness to notice other people's views and take them into account so that was probably the thing I scored lowest on. I scored fairly high on writing ability and articulateness and so forth.

One of the questions for American citizen services was well, you are in a town in Mexico and an elderly American woman has not paid her bill in several months and the owner of the hotel is going to evict her on the street but she insists that her Social Security check will be arriving any day now. What do you tell the owner of the hotel? So we had that question. That's pretty much all I remember.

They asked a question about trends in American literature in the 1980s and so I discussed Raymond Carver and minimalism and things like that. I think the main thing that got me through was shining my shoes and getting a good necktie and putting on a suit.

I got a notice that I passed the oral and then I did medical examinations and background check and filled in this enormous form and then heard nothing until early December of '87. I was working in a large high school. There was a phone in the classroom but I kept missing calls there because I was also teaching classes in other rooms in the building. They kept saying, "Well, you got this call and they said they'd call back." Then the next day, "Somebody called and said they'd call back." So finally I said, "Look, when they call will you get the number?"

I called that number from home and I called about 7 in the morning from Tacoma so it was already 10 in Washington, DC and they said, "We are forming an A-100 class that begins February 1st of 1988. Are you interested?" I said, "Sure, I'll be there."

It was early December so I had less than two months. I got the house ready to rent, I quit my job, I found homes for the cats, gave away most of our furniture, sold two cars. I had a great deal of work done on the house to make it ready to rent and then I found a rental agent. We pulled our son out of school and my wife quit her job and January 22nd of 1988 we got on a plane and came to Washington, DC.

It was a big change. It was quite stressful for our son because he had been living in Tacoma from kindergarten all the way through the start of eighth grade but I was really looking forward to leaving the Tacoma public schools. They had treated me very shabbily so it gave me great satisfaction to sign my resignation letter. We stayed over in Rosslyn for a while and then found an apartment near the Woodley Park metro stop. We got there about a week early to take care of various things so I took my son to Alice Deal Junior High School and enrolled him in a Washington, DC public school and he did reasonably well. He brought home his English textbook, this was in 1988 and I noticed that it was the same textbook and the same edition that I had used in junior high school in Honolulu, Hawaii in about 1960. At any rate, he was there for only half a year.

Q: What was the problem with the Tacoma high school?

CUSHING: I had been an administrator for the bilingual education program for three years. I was the acting coordinator while the coordinator was off in Lagos, Nigeria at the international school and I got the district embroiled in a nasty lawsuit because I attempted to have one of the teachers in the program fired from the district for incompetence. He had previously been a German teacher and then so many parents of students had complained that he was foisted off onto the bilingual program. He was a very rigid, arrogant, dogmatic person and he was spending most of his time in the teachers' lounge smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee while he left the class up to a Cambodian paraprofessional. Things came to a head. I tried to have him dismissed but the standard procedure in a school district is to write up a good evaluation for a teacher and then just transfer him to another school if he's a problem and so that is what had been happening to this fellow.

He retained his job. There was an arbitrator from the government who said that there were not grounds for his dismissal and he in turn sued the Tacoma public school district and me for the intentional infliction of emotional distress. So I became a pariah in the district. They sent me back down into the classroom. They hired a totally incompetent person to be the new coordinator who was constantly calling me on the telephone and asking me what to do. I thought, well, this is pretty shabby. I think I have had enough of that so that was one of my motivations for taking the Foreign Service exam.

Q: Your A-100 class. Could you sort of characterize it?

CUSHING: There were only two people in the class older than I was; I was almost 43 when I went in and there were a lot of people in their 20s, maybe a few in their early 30s. I didn't socialize with them a great deal mostly because I was had a wife and child already and was older than most of them. It was pretty good. I was very excited to be in an entering class. I don't remember a great deal about the exercises now except that it was exciting, it was stressful on my family. We put our son into a new school. I took placement exams in French, Spanish, Japanese, Korean and Persian and I do recall that even in A-100, people were playing favorites. We had this off site exercise down at Harper's Ferry in a hotel and there was an imaginary crisis involving a mythical country called Al Jazeera and they had two separate groups. Two separate American embassies, one here and one there and they named a person to be the Deputy Chief of Mission, there were retired ambassadors serving as ambassadors for the role play but they named this very attractive woman to be the Deputy Chief of Mission and I was a low-level officer, did some interviews with people playing the natives and discovered what the cause of the crisis was and how to solve it but the woman playing the DCM did not have time to meet with me. I said, "Hey, I've got the answer here." She said, "No, I'm busy. I'm in a meeting. Don't bother me."

So I thought, "Well, I wonder if the real Foreign Service is going to be like this." I finally said, "Listen, I would really like you to listen to me" and she said, "Stop interrupting me. I am serious" and she began screaming. I thought, "Well, is this what real work will be like?"

Q: She was one of the, as they call it, professionals?

CUSHING: She was a member of our class also. The two ambassadors were real retired ambassadors who were there for the role play and everyone else had been appointed so they said, "OK, you are now the DCM" and I was just a lowly junior officer but the crisis involved demanding payment for a debt and reducing the subsidies on flour and gas, which is exactly what happened in Egypt. I said, "Listen, I know what the answer is here" but she would not listen to me. We were in a group meeting and so I said, "Listen, I have something really important" and she said, "Shut up. I haven't got time for you." So I thought, "Well, OK."

She was posted to a consulate in New Zealand and even New Zealanders complained about her behavior and attitude when she was working in the consular section. She eventually married a New Zealander and dropped out of the Foreign Service. That was the end of that. I was a little bit disillusioned by that.

It was sort of the end game of the Cold War. Reagan and Gorbachev. Gorbachev came to Washington, DC and there was a great deal of excitement. There was a boom in Soviet things. The Secret Service and the Soviet guards were trading pins and there was a great deal of excitement about that.

My first assignment was Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic in the consular section. So I then took the ConGen course and my scores in that were 91, 95 and 98. I think they had a section on passports and citizenship and they had one on immigrant and non-immigrant visas and one on American citizen services. My average was just short of 95 for those courses so I did reasonably well in those.

We had come to Washington in late December or late January of '88 and just before July 4th we flew off to the Dominican Republic. I had done the A-100 class and the ConGen course and a little bit of area studies and Spanish and so forth.

Q: You say you were in your 40s when you took the A-100 and many of the class were in their 20s or early 30s. Did you get the feeling from taking and all that you were coming that you were going to be because of the time factor somewhat limited in where you could have all the fun in the Foreign Service but you were are unlikely to reach significant rank or something? Was that almost a given?

CUSHING: I assumed that. I never had any expectation that I was going to rise very high. For one thing, except for the Dominican Republic, every supervisor I had was quite a bit younger than I was and so I was not in a position to get a mentor of any kind. No matter where I was, there was often a certain level of I don't know if you would call it discomfort but I was always older than my supervisors and in many cases, more articulate or more intelligent or a better writer or something but I just tried to downplay that. It made for some limited expectations; I knew I wasn't going to rise very high and I didn't much care because it was such a relief to get out of my dead-end job in the Tacoma public schools and to get into something where I would have an opportunity to travel. I thought, well, this is already my second career so it's really not that important.

So we got to the Dominican Republic. We took our dog along. It was a very high stress environment in terms of visas because there were long lines, lots of people, and lots of interviews every day.

Q: What was the situation in the Dominican Republic? You were there from when to when?

CUSHING: I was there from July of '88 to January of '90.

Q: So what was the situation in the Dominican Republic?

CUSHING: The president was Joaquin Balaguer of the Social Christian Democrats.

Q: He was pretty old, wasn't he?

CUSHING: Balaguer was in the government under Trujillo, who was killed in '61 and then Balaguer was out of the country for a while and then he came back. He and his rival Juan Bosch were both extremely old. Balaguer must have been in his late 70s or early 80s by then and completely blind. The joke was he never knew when the electricity went out because he was blind.

It was definitely a third world country. What I thought was at the time the electricity went out all the time because there was a great deal of corruption in the electric company and there were problems with the union. The union at night would come and cut down the transformers from the poles and sell them for scrap metal and so there were constant brownouts and blackouts. We would have two or three hours of electricity a day. Of course, with no stop lights the traffic was constantly in chaos. There was always gridlock because when you came to an intersection that had stoplights, each person assumed that well, if there had been electricity, I would have had the green light so they'd just get all jammed up together.

I never really expressed this to anybody there but I thought either get the electricity squared away or just throw all these computers and air conditioners into the sea because they are worthless. You pretend you are this modern society with computers and television stations and air conditioning and so forth but you never have any electricity so you might as well go back to spearing fish and living in grass huts.

We had four auto accidents there just because the driving was so bad. Sometimes the water was off.

We started off renting a house and it turned out to be a big mistake. It was extremely noisy and very stressful because of the noise and also at one point we had hired a maid and an intruder came over the wall with an ice pick while none of us were there and raped the maid by holding an ice pick in her ear and saying, "I will have my way with you or I will stab you in the ear with my ice pick." That was extremely unpleasant.

We were in this house, especially my wife really not liking it. She liked it a lot at the beginning and then it was noisy, noisy, noisy so eventually, in January of '89 we were able to move to an apartment and were at the back side of the building away from traffic so that was quite a bit better. That was an improvement although the apartment had a generator but it could run only the elevators and a few lights in the hallways in the stairs so people would get a long extension cord and plug it in to one of the outlets in the hallway where there was electricity and try to run things off of that. We had a very small generator that could run the freezer.

I remember once watching the football game on city power and it was a very dramatic end to the game and there was a hail Mary pass and the quarterback threw and it was in the air and then poof, nothing. Everything went dead. By the time I got the generator on, the announcer said, "Wow. That was the most amazing play I've ever seen." The filter for the swimming pool would only run on city power. The generators did not have the capacity to run the filter so the pool would get green and slimy. When the water was off, my shower in the morning would be to go down to the pool with a bar of soap and a plastic garbage can and just get a plastic garbage can of this slimy water and douse it over myself and get soaped up and then put another plastic bucket of slimy water over myself and then towel off and then take a smaller bucket of slimy water upstairs to shave with in the dark. I'd often come into work kind of cut up and people would say, "What happened to you? And I'd say, "A cold water shave in the dark. What do you expect?"

Q: Let's talk about the work.

CUSHING: I had pretty good supervisors. I started out with immigrant visas and I did immigrant visas for a while. They were remodeling the consulate at the time. First we had a little cubicle or office and people came in, right into the consulate and saw us and we had a stack of cases on our desk and we'd do those and we had no time off for lunch so I'd just take in a can of tuna and some crackers and eat the tuna and crackers while I was working. We didn't have a lunch break; it was a very high volume place.

There was a considerable amount of fraud; a woman would say she'd have, so many children, she would claim people on her immigrant visa who were not hers, there would be one baby born in say, September of '69 and then there would be another kid born in March of '70 and then another kid born in January of '71 or something. I'd say, "These can't possibly be all your children." "No, look each one is in a different year, look at that. '68, '69, '70. There's no problem whatsoever. I don't know why you are bothering about this," and so forth. We had a lot of fake marriages.

Q: Where were they going? Mostly New York or was it?

CUSHING: Mostly to New York, some to Miami, some to New York. There would be an entire package; there'd be phony wedding pictures and a phony marriage license and we'd have all these cases where a 55 year old Puerto Rican woman came to the Dominican Republic and fell in love with a 20 year old cab driver on the way from the airport to the hotel and they got married three days later.

I still remember one. This fellow claimed that his fiancée, I guess his fiancée had a green card in the U.S. and was petitioning for him. I said, "Do you have any letters that would show proof of a continuing relationship?" So he took a letter off the top of the stack and handed it to me and it said, 'Josée, I am sending back the ring. Send me my clothes. I know what you have been doing. If I ever see you again I am going to cut your heart out and feed it to you.'

I said, "Wow. This doesn't look like she is ready to get married to you." He said, "Oh, can I see that letter? Uhh, women get emotional sometimes."

I tried to give people the benefit of the doubt. At one point there was a woman who had a bunch of kids and there was one girl and I said, "This is a little fishy here. Would you tell me what is going on?" And she said, "Well, listen. This is our niece; both her parents were killed in a car crash when she was an infant. We have raised her as our own child. We registered her as our own child. She is not my biological daughter but I love her just the same as my regular children." I said, "Well, OK. Look, we'll include her in the visa package but don't ever tell anybody else this."

We had one guy who was deaf, dumb and blind and tested positive for venereal disease. Occasionally we'd get someone who was HIV positive and didn't know it. I didn't want to be the one to tell him so I'd say, "Listen. We've got a little problem with the process here. I think you need to go see your physician and talk to him about this."

So the immigrant visas were fairly routine. They would try to fraudulently include children. There would be fraudulent marriages and so forth.

When I worked on non immigrant visas, I probably should have refused more people. I had kind of a soft heart so other people were refusing nine out of ten and I was refusing maybe six out of ten. I expect there are a lot of people who overstayed their visas because I didn't want to turn them down.

There was this one girl who needed medical treatment. She had a brain tumor. She came in with a shaved head. I started looking at the papers and she burst out crying. I said, "Que paso (What is it?)" She said, "No quiero morir (I don't want to die)." So I said, "OK, if you stop crying by the time I count to ten, I'll give you a visa." So she did.

There was a Haitian gentleman who was both a medical doctor and a minister and he had a letter that he was going to a conference of Methodist ministers in Illinois somewhere. I thought well, he looks like a high class gentleman. So I gave him a visa and about three or four weeks later my supervisor called me over. At that time we had no computerized name checks. We had microfiches with names of people on a watch list but they were always months out of date. There was no way to telephone from the Dominican Republic to Haiti. So I gave this fellow a visa. I thought, medical doctor, minister going to a religious conference in the U.S., fine.

About four weeks later my supervisor called me to his office and he said, "Did you give a visa to a Haitian named Roger Lafontant?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Oh. Well, he's the head of the Ton-ton Macoutes." "Oh?" "He went to Miami, bought a boatload of guns and came back and was involved in an aborted coup." I said, "Oh." He said, "The next time you get a Haitian applicant, would you check with me first?" I said, "Sure, I can do that."

Q: For someone reading the Ton-ton Macoutes is the sort of the mafia and enforcers of the Duvalier regime and all that, a pretty scary bunch of guys.

CUSHING: One time there was another Haitian there and I refused him so he reached into a pocket and put a whole bunch of dust on the window. There was a window of bulletproof glass and there was a little slot through which you could pass documents. So he threw this whole bunch of dust down on his side and he cupped up his hands and blew it, so this enormous cloud of powder came all over me and he said, "You refused me for a visa. This is magic ju-ju dust and you are going to die."

Q: Well, you are still here.

CUSHING: Yeah. So I dusted myself off and said, "Next."

We had a fellow who wanted to take his grandson to Disney World in Orlando and he was a dentist. He had a couple of suitcases with him. I said, "How do I know that you are a dentist?" He said, "Wait a minute." He brought up one of the valises to the window and opened it up and it was full of all the teeth that he had pulled. I said, "Oh, OK. How do I know that you have enough money for your trip to Disneyland?" He said, "Oh, wait a minute." He opened up the other valise and it was jammed with these wads of one and five dollar American dollar bills. I said, "OK" and gave him a visa.

Some of the younger guys were trading visas for the favors of young ladies. If they saw an attractive young woman...

Q: You are talking about vice consuls.

CUSHING: Yes.

Q: Sex has always been a big problem.

CUSHING: Yes. I was married so I never got into that but what they'd do is they would grant the visa and they'd leave their name card inside and say, "Let's discuss your visa case further" or something. Sometimes they would append the visa and say, "Well, we've got a couple of little details that need to be worked out" and then they'd write their name and number on the card and slip it in the passport.

There was a woman once who said she'd like to meet me privately. I refused her and she said, "I'd like to meet you privately to discuss this case" and I said, "I don't think that would be appropriate, thank you." I got a passport once with a hundred dollar bill in it. When I flipped it open there was a U.S. hundred dollar bill and so I immediately called the consular officer in the next booth. I said, "Would you come over here, witness that this passport contains a hundred dollar bill which I have not touched?" Then I called my supervisor over and said, "My neighboring vice consul is willing to testify that this passport contains a one hundred dollar bill that I have not touched."

The applicant was saying, "Oh, my goodness. How did that get in there? I must have forgotten it when I was sorting through my papers." So we gave him back his hundred dollar bill and his passport and told him to get lost.

There were a lot of fraudulent documents.

Q: Was there a history of special investigations of vice consuls or consuls who were selling visas there or not?

CUSHING: We had one FSN, Foreign Service national, a very nice older woman who every year bought another stretch of beachfront property up on the north coast but apparently they could never pin anything on her.

There was another woman from Puerto Rico who was a working spouse, PIT, part time, intermediate, temporary or something who was selling visas but instead of being prosecuted, she was just fired. Then she was hired by the Dominican telephone company, interesting.

I think there was some kind of investigation after I had left. I honestly don't know what came of it.

Q: Who was your ambassador while you were there?

CUSHING: Paul Taylor.

Q: What was his background?

CUSHING: He was a veteran of the navy and the embassy was quite a ways from the consulate, about three or four blocks. I didn't see him often all that often but I did hear a few stories.

One of them was that one of the economic officers took a survey among embassy people, are you satisfied with the provision of electricity? Everybody else said no. We have to use the generator a lot and the electricity goes out a lot. The problem with using the generator was it was very noisy and very smoky; it made a big racket so a lot of people had them out in their yard in a little house. If none of your neighbors had generators, you were the only guy there running a generator so there were cases where people had a generator and if they turned it on and none of their neighbors had any electricity there was bad feeling; in one case the family had a swimming pool. The neighbors were in apartments all around them they would throw garbage from their balcony into the guy's swimming pool to express their discontent that he had a generator and they didn't.

Getting back to the ambassador; they had a survey, are you satisfied with your electricity or not? So the economic officer took it to the ambassador and said, "Well, I've never had any problems with my electricity. I don't understand what this is all about. So you are going to have to put me down as saying yes, I am satisfied. I don't know why all these people are complaining like this. I always have electricity." So it was like 99% no, I am not satisfied and 1% which was the ambassador, yes, I am satisfied with my electricity.

A couple of other stories I heard; he had this Lincoln town car as his ambassadorial vehicle and he had it repainted three times until it got to the exact shade of midnight blue that he liked. He was dissatisfied that the bookshelves in his library in the ambassador's residence were not level so he would put a ball bearing on each shelf and see if it rolled one way or the other and then ask the carpenters to reposition the bookshelves.

At one point there was a town hall meeting. A lot of the embassy wives were saying, "Well, we can't buy any meat because our freezers keep going off. There's no electricity so we can't buy any meat because it will spoil and so the ambassador's wife said, "Well, why don't you all come in and use the freezer at the residence. You'd be welcome to label your meat and put it in there and why don't we say every Wednesday from 1 to 3 you can either put meat in or take it out."

Q: Did you have much social contact with the Dominicans?

CUSHING: My wife got into a dance class with a very interesting fellow who was a very good dancer and a very good teacher and so we met various dancers and artists through him. So we did have some contact with Dominican people.

Q: You left there in what? 1990, was it?

CUSHING: Yes.

Actually, I have one more story from there.

One other thing that happened was when we arrived in the Dominican Republic, our air freight got sent to Dakar, Senegal and the administrative counselor, Lucille Thomas, was not seized with any sense of urgency at all about that. We got there with no air freight because it had been sent to Dakar, Senegal so it took us another two months to get our air freight. She was not highly thought of, the person, the administrative counselor there.

I was bidding on my next post while in the Dominican Republic. This would have been about June of 1989. I had lived in Japan so I already spoke Japanese and had tested at 3-2, and there was a position open at the consulate in Osaka-Kobe for a political-economic rotation so I bid on that and my career development officer, CDO, called and said, "Well, things are looking pretty good" and then she called and said, "Congratulations, you've been paneled." So my wife who was from Japan was very excited. She called up her mother in Japan and her family and said, "Hey, guess what? Our next assignment will be in Japan" and everyone is congratulating me.

Then I got a TM-1, which was a cable from Tokyo saying 'Welcome to Embassy Tokyo' and this, that and the other and then about three weeks later my career development officer called me up and she said, "Well, it seems as if that position in Osaka-Kobe was listed by mistake. There is already someone else in the pipeline that is going there. Everything else that you bid on has already been taken and Friday is my last day as your career development officer. Goodbye and good luck."

So I was suddenly stuck. I had no onward assignment. We had already told my wife's family that we were going to Japan and I was dumbstruck because I thought, "Wow. This is so bizarre. I was told I was paneled, I got a TM-1 from Tokyo and suddenly this thing is jerked away from me and no one ever gave me a satisfactory explanation for what had happened." I have no idea what happened but it made me realize that the entire bidding system was rigged. If you didn't know somebody, if you didn't have connections then it was entirely possible to get screwed out of something even after you had been told that you had it. That was a rather disillusioning experience.

Fortunately, the DCM in Santo Domingo, a woman named Pat Langford, was very sympathetic. She talked to the ambassador and she wrote a letter to Ed Perkins who I think was director general at the time and explained what had happened. Ed Perkins was apparently quite embarrassed by the whole thing so he sent down a directive that I should get something fairly good and so they gave me The Hague in the Netherlands as my second post.

My wife was not very happy because she didn't like cold places. What she said was, "Look, we are originally scheduled to rotate out of there in January. Why don't we extend until June and bid on the summer cycle?" I said, "Look, if we go to The Hague, I'll have language, we will be back on the summer cycle" so she finally grudgingly accepted that.

My new career development officer was Joe Ruth. There's also something in the middle here. After I had gotten screwed out of the position in Osaka Kobe he said, "Look, I understand what happened and we are going to try and make it right for you. There's an economic position at the embassy in Tokyo. I will put you in for that." I said, "Well, OK. That's fine." "That's really outrageous what happened to you," he said. We all feel very badly about it and we don't know how it happened." So I said, "OK, could you send me the position description?" He said, "Oh, sure. I'll get right on that."

So weeks went by and I got no position description for the economic position in Tokyo. Then I called up my new CDO and said, "What happened to the economic position in Tokyo?" "Oh, somebody else got it."

By this time my deputy chief of mission, Pat Langford, and the ambassador had both talked to Ed Perkins who apparently talked to my CDO and said "Get this fellow something halfway decent" and so I got The Hague.

Q: You were in The Hague from when to when?

CUSHING: I was there from the summer of 1990, got there just after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Had a Dutch language course the first half of 1990. I finished a 24 week course in 19 weeks. I got a 3/3plus. We lived in an apartment in Ballston so I'd walk down the hill to Rosslyn for my classes. I had Dutch language from late January for about 19 weeks and then we eventually ended up in The Hague in August.

It was at the time of the first Iraq war. The ambassador was a political appointee of George H. W. Bush who had donated \$200,000 to his campaign. He was 53 years old, divorced with five children and spent most of his time dating 20 year old Dutch girls. He made his fortune in the pizza business. His parents, when he graduated from Harvard had given him a bunch of Pizza Huts and he had expanded those and so he was extremely wealthy and had been a generous donor to the Bush campaign and so was made ambassador to the Netherlands.

We got to The Hague during the time of the first Iraq war. The political section had a political counselor, an external political officer, a pol/mil officer and an internal political officer. It was way overstaffed. There was work for two people and there were four people there so I had a very thin portfolio and very little to do.

Q: You were in the political section?

CUSHING: Yes, I was in the political section there. I did as much as I could. I was in charge of overseeing Dutch relations with Suriname and the Dutch Antilles. It was a fairly low profile thing and I wrote the human rights report and went out and spoke to student groups and so forth.

My first EER was

Q: That's the employee efficiency report.

CUSHING: My first employee evaluation report was not very well done, although I guess my boss thought it was OK, but I got a notice in October of '91 that I had been denied tenure and was going to be given a fifth year. I called my CDO and said, "What's going on there?" He said, "Well, you got very good employee evaluation reports all the time you were in Santo Domingo. It talked about what a diligent officer you were and how enthusiastic you were and so forth but it did mention that you got really upset when you were screwed out of your position in Osaka Kobe and then your employee efficiency report from The Hague was very mediocre and so what it looks like, what the committee said was 'well, we can't give this guy tenure because he started off like a rocket and then he leveled off,' so if you had gotten a mediocre series of evaluations in the Dominican Republic followed by a mediocre evaluation in the Hague, you would have gotten tenure because they would have said, 'Well, here's a mediocre guy and he's still mediocre and let's give him tenure' but because you showed so much potential in the Dominican Republic and you did not realize it in the Hague, that's why they denied you tenure."

I said, "OK, let me get this straight. If I had gotten nothing but mediocre evaluations I would have been tenured by now but because I got excellent evaluations in my first post and a mediocre evaluation in my second post, I am now being denied tenure."

"Yes, that's right."

So here I am, 46 years old with a son about to go into college and I had been denied tenure. That made a very stressful situation.

Coupled with that, between Santo Domingo and The Hague I got, I had talked to Mark Minton, the deputy director of the Japan desk who said, "Well, I don't know what happened to your assignment but if anything ever comes up, if I can ever be of any help to you, just give me a call." So I called him from The Hague because the position in Osaka Kobe was becoming open again, I called him. He said, "Yes, what can I do for you?" I said, "Well, I am calling about the position in Osaka Kobe and he said, "Jesus Christ. We are in the middle of the Iraq war. We are trying to get Japan to help pay for the war. They won't send any troops. I am really busy. Who the hell do you think you are to be calling me like this?" He screamed at me for about two minutes. And then he said, "If you want something, send me a letter." This is the same guy who had previously said, to call him if he could be of any help, and I guess later I found out he was known as what they call a 'screamer'. He had previously said, "Well, I am sorry stuff didn't work out for you but if I can ever be of any help to you, give me a call." So I called him up and he screamed at me for wasting his time in the middle of the Iraq war. Mark Minton. Now the ambassador to Mongolia.

Virtually my entire second year in The Hague was kind of under a cloud. I could not bid on another foreign post because I had been denied tenure and given a fifth year. I thought it an extremely unpleasant saturation.

So they shipped us back to Washington. Our son was about to leave for college, I guess so we didn't have to worry about high school for him but for about the first three months, September, October and November they had me in the ARA, the American Republic Affairs front office as a staff assistant. The shifts were from 6 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon, 7 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon or 3 in the afternoon to about 11:30 at night. I had a chronic sinus infection, couldn't shake it. Our son went off to college. Our dog that had been with us for 12 years had to be euthanized a few days later because she had an inoperable tumor, so suddenly our son was away and our dog had died and I still had no idea whether I was going to get tenure or not.

The fellow who was in charge of the front office at ARA, American Republic Affairs said, "Well, look. This job is kind of too difficult for you" or "This is no job for an old man" or something, so I got moved to Andean Affairs. Andean Affairs included Venezuela, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. At the Department of State they have what are called 'Pullmans'. It was a formerly normal sized office that had been cut in half to put in a corridor so it was a very narrow office. I was down the hall from the regular room that had all the other Andean Affairs offices in it. I sat in a Pullman with nothing to do for two years. I just sat in the Pullman. Very occasionally if one of the desk officers was traveling or was on leave, I would fill in there. I did my best to get educated on everything that was happening. I was extremely underutilized so essentially I would just sit in there and stare out the window at the park across the street.

My final review, I finally got tenure which was a great relief.

Q: I am surprised you got tenure because you say you didn't really have a job.

CUSHING: I got tenure based on my final evaluation from The Hague because my boss in the political section was extremely defensive. My CDO sent something back and said, "Well, the writing is flat. It is not a very good evaluation." My boss in The Hague got very defensive and said, "This is outrageous." He made an effort to write a very good evaluation for my final evaluation in The Hague so based on that I squeaked through and got tenure. So after I was back in the U.S. with no possibility of a foreign assignment, the head of Andean Affairs came and said, "Well, John, I would just like you to know you finally got tenure."

So after that I sat in a Pullman, a very narrow office for two years with nothing to do, just sat around there.

After that I went to Guatemala. Guatemala was good. I was the labor attaché^{1/2} and there was a very chaotic situation there. I worked on labor rights. Every now and then the workers would occupy a farm or ranch and they would be shot up by the army or the police or something. There were abductions of labor activists, there were murders.

Q: Where was this?

CUSHING: Guatemala. After getting up really early to catch the plane I arrived totally exhausted on the first day and the ambassador said, "Oh, we have a delegation here from USTR so I want you to come to this lunch." I was totally exhausted but she said, "You must come to this lunch," so I started working the first day. The ambassador...

Q: Who was the ambassador?

CUSHING: Marilyn McAfee, a nice lady, very sharp. Marilyn McAfee had been in Guatemala many years before with USIA and she was now the ambassador and so she put me to work the very first day, which I thought, after two years of sitting in a Pullman doing nothing, was good.

I was extremely busy there. The assistant secretary of labor came down. I was in charge of labor rights. I was not the human rights officer but I was the refugee officer so I covered refugees returning from the insurgency who were being resettled in various places in Guatemala. There was a massacre of returned Guatemala refugees by an army patrol. I got very involved in that and I worked with the UN High Commission for Refugees and also with MINUGUA, which is the United Nations Verification Mission to Guatemala. I had a lot of work with them. Every now and then a refugee would be killed in a camp and I would have to go and investigate that. There was a great deal of pressure from human rights groups, church groups, labor groups in the United States that had a knee jerk reaction that because of the 1954 coup, anything that had happened since then in Guatemala was the fault of the United States.

Q: This was the Arbenz coup.

CUSHING: The coup where Jacobo Arbenz was thrown out. That was the United Fruit Company coup, by John Foster and Allen Dulles.

Once I got a human rights group down there and I gave them what I thought was an objective assessment of the situation and one of them later wrote a letter to the assistant secretary of the American Republic Affairs complaining that I was unsympathetic to human rights concerns. I was obviously unqualified to be a Foreign Service officer and I should be fired immediately.

The other big thing down here was the Jennifer Harbury case. Jennifer Harbury claimed she had married Eduardo who was a guerrilla in the insurrection and that he had disappeared so she demanded since she was an American citizen and he was her husband, she demanded that we help find him. We went around and around and around with that.

There was also Dianna Ortiz who claimed to have been abducted and tortured by the Guatemalan military including being thrown in a pit with decaying bodies and all this other stuff. There was never a dull moment down there.

I was there for three years. It's a beautiful country. The only problems down there were allergies and crime. Because it was the land of eternal spring, it was the land of eternal pollen so I had a chronic series of ear infections and sinus infections. Finally the doctor punched open my eardrum with a little needle and he had a little vacuum cleaner and he sucked all the fluid out of there and put in a drain, so I could blow smoke through my ear back when I used to smoke.

It was a beautiful country. I drove all over the country, went on a lot of back roads, and had a really good time there.

Q: You alluded to a number of things but what was the basic political situation at that time?

CUSHING: There was the democratically elected president, of Ramiro de Leon Carpio. He was under a great deal of pressure from the military. The public prosecutor's office was also kind of under the sway of the military so Myrna Mack, an anthropologist who was working on human rights cases had been stabbed to death not too long before and labor activists were taken away and beaten and so forth.

There was another case where there was a woman who claimed she had been abducted and assaulted for her union activities but she turned out to be mentally ill. There was a labor rights group in the United States that was pushing her case and I found out that her stories were made up of whole cloth but I did not feel like telling everybody, "Look, she's mentally ill and she has made all this up and her husband is also mentally ill and they are both HIV positive. I have checked her story and it doesn't add up."

Among other things that happened, one night she claimed that her son had been kidnapped. Her son had disappeared so the legal attaché^{1/2}, who was an FBI agent, he with a firearm and I with nothing went out to the toughest neighborhood in Guatemala City and spent the entire night looking around, asking people if they had seen this boy. It was one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the whole city. He turned up in the morning and claimed that he had been held and tied up and this, that and the other but eventually it turned out he just spent the night at a friend's house and had come back the next morning. So that whole story was a fabrication too.

This woman's claim to be persecuted was very thin but this labor rights group from the U.S. with union officials and so forth came down and they said, "Why are you not pursuing this more vigorously?" I knew already knew the entire background of it and that it was all made up but I said, "Well, I am not able to comment on that." "You don't care. You just don't care. I'm going to go back and tell everybody in my union the very poor service we are getting from the United States Embassy."

I said, "I'm sorry. That's all I can do."

This woman was eventually granted asylum in the United States but was such a difficult person that two or three different organizations asked her to leave. She was in these group houses for refugees and they would throw her out.

At any rate, Guatemala was a good post; interesting, a lot of work.

Q: You were there from when to when?

CUSHING: I was there from the summer of '94 to the summer of '97.

Q: Were there any significant developments in the political scene or was it sort of the same the whole time you were there?

CUSHING: There was a peace accord signed in '96 so the different guerrilla factions, which all combined probably numbered no more than 1,000 in different parts of the country, eventually did sign a peace treaty. What they did was they turned in their old weapons and kept their good weapons and became highway robbers. Instead of holding up people for contributions to the insurrection, they signed a peace treaty and kept their best weapons and they just became gangs that held up people for their own personal profit. That was the level of development there.

In '97 we went off to Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby. That was a very tough post.

Q: I have heard that.

CUSHING: The thing about Port Moresby everywhere there was critical threat crime. There were no safe parts of town. The Japanese ambassador was carjacked in the driveway of his own residence. The wife of the New Zealand high commissioner was driving and someone dropped a chunk of concrete off an overpass, shattered the windshield so she got an eyeful of broken glass. There was a fellow about to go into the Australian high commission and they had this little keypad that you had to punch the code for the gate to open so he rolled down his window and was punching in the code and somebody jumped out of a bush with a machete and chopped his arm off and then hauled him out of the car and drove away in the car. Gang rape was a big problem.

At any rate, we did not do well there at all. My wife had problems with herniated discs and so we went down to Brisbane for consultations. She decided not to have surgery and she came back and eventually it got so bad she couldn't walk so we went back and had surgery for the herniated discs.

The one good thing about the time in Papua New Guinea was that we did have one trip to Guadalcanal and Vanuatu so I was able to visit the battlefields of Guadalcanal and also drive around in Vanuatu. That was very nice.

We got there in August of '97. In June of '98 my wife was attacked by a gang of bandits. I never sufficiently impressed on her the need to have the windows rolled up and the air conditioner on. She hated air conditioning so she would drive with the windows down and no air conditioning. She was coming back from dropping off a Japanese friend at her (the friend's) apartment. She was coming back to our compound which was on top of a hill. Every time I took the turn off the main road to the road leading to our compound, I would take the turn very fast and drive very fast and I never apparently impressed on her the necessity of driving fast.

She came upon a roadblock and they had these gangs of what they called 'rascals' who are people who make their living by crime. They have no skills and there's no work so they make their living by robbing people. Often they are sent from villages in the mountains. If there is a young man in the village that is creating problems, they will take up a collection and buy him a one way plane ticket; an airplane plane was the only way out, a one way plane ticket to Port Moresby and say, "Don't come back." So you get the dregs of the whole island ending up in Port Moresby. They find people who speak their same language which is called "wontok", one talk. They will live in a group house and they will all pay part of the rent but they are responsible for getting their own food so they live by crime.

They had put up a roadblock and my wife saw this roadblock and a fellow standing in the middle of the road and didn't know quite what to do so she slowed down and then she thought well, I might get abducted and raped so then she thought she would try to drive through the roadblock and had the windows down and so this fellow smashed her on the head with a big rock, fractured her skull so she was driving the car while unconscious. She rolled it up the side of the hill and then it rolled. So after the car stopped rolling they reached in and took her purse and radio and so forth.

She was able to climb out of the demolished car and start staggering up the hill. There was another housing compound where there people who worked for a bank. There was a young man there who worked for the bank so he and his wife took her into their apartment and got her cleaned up a little bit and then took her to a clinic and then our deputy chief of mission decided that she should be medically evacuated to Brisbane. She was put on an air ambulance to Brisbane that same day. Her blood pressure when they put her on the plane was 82 over 50 because she had lost so much blood.

They put her on this air ambulance. There was someone else who had been injured in an automobile accident so he was on the same flight. She was in the hospital in Brisbane for about two weeks. Her face got all swollen up and she had internal bleeding in the brain and she had a fractured skull and as a result of the brain injury caused by the rock, she lost a significant part of her hearing. She had 10% hearing in one ear and maybe 40% hearing in the other because of brain damage from the rock. I concluded we were not going to serve out our tour in Port Moresby. She needed specialized attention so I told the ambassador we were going to curtail and we did.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

CUSHING: Arma Jane Karaer, a very nice woman.

Another thing that happened in Port Moresby was the consular officer got sick so he was down in Australia for several months so in addition to doing the political stuff, I also was doing consular. I'd do consular half day and then do political.

One extremely interesting experience I had in Papua New Guinea was when I accompanied a U.S. army team, CILHI, they are based in Hawaii and their mission is to recover the remains of war dead. They concentrated on Vietnam but if they had a little extra time, they'd try to get remains out of Korea, North Korea and if they still had a little extra time and money, they would look for World War II remains. The pressure from families was all from the Vietnam people, the missing from Vietnam but occasionally they'd do World War II so they came down.

I went with them to some very remote crash sites. We had records of a bomber that had crashed on top of a mountain; a B-24 bomber so we hiked to that. We hiked about waist deep in a stream for about two hours and then we climbed up a cliff for two hours and the natives in the area had all decided to serve as guides so everybody in the village turned out because they all wanted to get their \$20 a day for being a guide and so they said, "When we get to the crash site, we will bang on something so you can hear the noise and you will know which part of the cliff to climb." Of course, they were much faster than we were. So we are climbing the cliff and we hear bang, bang, bang, bang. We get there and this guy has got a metal rod and he's banging on a live 500 pound bomb with this piece of metal. So we said, "OK, you can stop banging."

So we went through there and there were also a couple of fighter planes that had gone down in different areas. There was a P-38 and a P-47 that had gone down. This fellow took a nurse for a ride in his P-47 but he forgot to check the fuel tank so they got up to about 10,000 feet, ran out of fuel and went straight in. We were able to get their remains out. They were both buried in Arlington Cemetery, one grave for him, one for her, one comingled.

There was a Corsair that had crashed and gone into a hill so we were able find the engine and part of the tail assembly and wheel. We got a serial number and called Michael Claringbould, an Australian with detailed knowledge of the Fifth Air Force, and he identified the aircraft for us.

In several cases the villagers had sold the wreckage of the aircraft for scrap metal and had simply kept the remains off to the side. One person did very good job. He got a box and lined it with fabric and dusted it with insecticide and put all the bones in there. So he wanted \$500 for that so I think they paid him.

There was another case where they had all the remains somewhere and so there was a Papua New Guinea policeman along and said, "Look, you can be prosecuted for pulling these remains out and selling the plane but we don't want to take the whole village to jail so what would you like?" So they worked out a deal if they could spend an afternoon at a hotel in the city of Lae with all the beer they could drink and all the French fries they could eat, they would give us the bones of this pilot.

So they got a van and took everybody into town and got several cases of beer. All the men in the village drank enormous quantities of beer and ate enormous quantities of French fries and then they got in the van and were driven back to the village.

There was another related case where a wealthy fellow from the U.S. decided to do everything by himself. He did not consult with the U.S. government or the government of Papua New Guinea. He was looking for his uncle's B-24. He just contracted a private helicopter and native guides and what he found instead was a B-25 which had gone into a cliff and then had kind of slid down the cliff and so he thought he would pick up whatever remains were there. It started to rain and so all the villagers said, "Well, we're going home now" and they each had a collection of bones that they had picked up so they were going off in all different directions with all the bones. He said, "Hold it, hold it. Give me all the bones." So they ripped fabric from the interior of the wreckage and wrapped up the bones in that. So they had all these packets of bones wrapped up in canvas so he put them all in an enormous knapsack. On a Sunday morning his flight out of there back to Australia was at noon so he knocked on the ambassador's door and said, "Here" and gave her this knapsack with comingled skeletal remains of different crew members.

She came to me later and said, "John, I've got these bones. I don't want them at my house. Will you take them?" I said, "Oh, sure" so I went over and got this knapsack full of bones and they sat in my house but then when the CILHI team came over, they had a forensic pathologist and so we took this knapsack full of human skeletal remains to the embassy and we went into the meeting room, got this big conference room table and spread out some newspaper and he had somebody taking notes and he'd say, "Right femur" and then he'd put it there. Then he'd say, "Left tibia, no, not the same guy. Put that over there." We were reassembling these sets of skeletal remains from this jumble that we got. He put together as much as he could and then contacted the government of Papua New Guinea and got permission to export human remains and so they were able to export them to Hawaii. I think they were continuing to work with the dental work from the teeth that they had. That was probably one of the best ways. This fellow was very good. To me they were all just a bunch of bones. He was able to get at least three sets of distinct remains. He'd say, "Look, this is a femur and this is one, but they are not from the same man. This one goes over here. These are different people." He was extremely good at that.

One other thing that happened was the building that housed the Papua New Guinea ministry of foreign affairs burned down and they did not bother to inform us so I went out to the ministry of foreign affairs to deliver a demarche and found this charred shell of a building with a fence around it. I asked the watchman, "Where have they gone?" He said, "Dunno."

Three weeks went by and we got a fax from one of the business centers of one of the hotels in Port Moresby. It said, 'The ministry of foreign affairs presents its compliments and has the honor to inform the embassy of the United States of America that we are temporarily operating out of the business center of the Hilton Hotel.'

Q: Could you talk a bit about the political situation there and what was our interest?

CUSHING: The prime minister was Bill Skate, who was essentially a gang leader who had worked his way up. There was a connection between the gangs of Rascals and the government. They would hire these Rascals on make-work contracts and pay them government money. For example, they had a lawn care contract but there wasn't a blade of grass in the whole city. Maybe some of the ambassadorial residences would have a small lawn but that was about it. They would get these lawn care contracts for government buildings where there was nothing but bare dirt around the building.

Another thing that happened was when the Australians turned Papua New Guinea over and it became an independent country a lot of Australians stayed around. They were hired by the government but there were a lot of natives who thought they should get those jobs so they contracted with these gangs of Rascals to harass, abduct and rape the Australian wives of these civil servants who were still there so that they would leave. Or an Australian civil servant contracted to the government of Papua New Guinea would come home and find 20 Rascals sitting in his front yard with cutlasses and revolvers and what have you. He would conclude that it was time for him to go back to Australia. They were used for intimidation; they were used to harass political enemies and so forth.

Bill Skate was essentially a gangster who had worked his way up to be prime minister. He was suspected of several murders but never charged. His father was an unknown Australian and his mother was from Papua New Guinea. I went to a few sittings of parliament.

There were some government officials playing golf on a golf course once and they were held up by a gang of Rascals. One of the guys told the Rascals, "You can't hold me up. I am a high government official. I'm the minister of finance." Not only did they hold him up, they took his pants and shoes.

The national interest we had was there was oil there and gold, so Chevron had a big outfit there and there was a huge missionary community, the New Tribes missionaries because their mission was to translate the Bible into every known language so they would send out researchers. If they found a tribe that still had enough people speaking the language so they were convinced that the language would not die out, they would live with those people and study the language and figure out a way to transcribe the language, teach the people to read their own language and then print the Bible in that language because it was their mission to make sure that every person on earth had the ability to read the Bible in his or her own language. Since Papua New Guinea has 2,000 languages, they were a busy group.

Our main missions were providing consular support to Chevron and its employees and doing the same for this very large group of American missionaries there.

Q: How did they, given the crime, was crime pretty well confined to Port Moresby so that the missionaries and Chevron were off somewhere else?

CUSHING: Chevron had its headquarters there but they had a pretty well guarded compound and the missionaries were off in a compound all by itself, kind of off away from the towns. The bigger towns like, OK, Moresby was bad, Lae had a lot of crime, and Mount Hagen had crime, a gold mining town. Regarding some of the oil operations, I talked to various people who worked there and they were off in remote locations. They didn't have too much trouble with crime at all.

The main thing was, we had a Peace Corps program there also and they were out in the small villages but the people of Papua New Guinea had developed sort of an entitlement mentality. They got a lot of money from the Australians and we had very little money to give them so we were not taken seriously. It was not uncommon for the prime minister to make an appointment to see the ambassador and then stand her up at the last minute. The ambassador would arrive at the prime minister's office and the secretary would say, "He went somewhere else." We were not taken seriously because we did not have these hundreds of thousands of dollars to shovel at them the way the Australians did.

There was a lot of illegal logging by Indonesian timber companies and once again, an Australian aid organization would come in and say, "We are going to build a clinic and a school. We are going to use this land." "Well, OK, it's all very well you are going to build a free school and a free clinic, but you have to compensate us for the land on which you are going to build it." So not only are they getting a free school and a clinic, they are getting extra money for the land.

The Indonesian loggers, Indonesia is not too far from there, they would come in and some local guy would say, "I'm the chief, I own the forest and I am in charge of it so just pay me X amount of dollars and you can log this land." So they'd start logging and some other guy would say, "No, I am the chief. This guy is an imposter. You've got to pay me Y amount of dollars" and so there were a lot of fights there.

There were wars between the tribes up in the mountains. They'd fight each other with spears and slingshots. There was one case where there was a van of workers from one village and a fellow in a car from a different village hit this van and killed three of the workers. Now this one village owed the other village the lives of three people so what they did was one night they got this old woman who had tuberculosis who was about to die and the town drunk and this mentally retarded guy and they tied them all up and left them in the middle of the village and then everybody else took off for the jungle. So the other tribe came in and killed the old woman who was about to die and the mentally retarded guy and the town drunk so that that was cleared because they had killed three people from that village. Then everybody else came back into the village.

Q: Were the Japanese active there because the Japanese lost maybe 100,000 people at New Guinea but also they were left to starve. An awful lot were by passed during the war. I am just wondering about trying to recover the remains.

CUSHING: I don't recall. There was a Japanese embassy there but I don't recall that they were actively involved in remains recovery.

There was also Irian Jaya which is the western half of the island which is part of Indonesia. There was a small guerrilla movement there because the people there, the natives were treated very badly by the Freeport Mining Company. They were chased out of their mountain area and sent down to the swamps where they got malaria and died and so forth. So there was some violence at the border area also.

Q: How did you work as sort of a political officer? Was there any politics going on?

CUSHING: All we ever got were these instructions for demarches, "Ask Papua New Guinea to vote with us on some resolution in the UN" and we never got a response. We'd go over and make the demarche and so forth.

The other thing I had to do was send faxes to the Solomon Islands government in Honiara in Guadalcanal and the government of Vanuatu in Port Vila. Their ministry of foreign affairs in Vanuatu was one room in a shopping center in the town that sold souvenirs. They had one little room in the back of a shop that sold souvenirs with a telephone and a fax and that was their ministry of foreign affairs.

They surely lost money on us there because not only was my wife medically evacuated to Brisbane for surgery on herniated discs, but then she was evacuated again for a fractured skull and head injuries. That wasn't a good post.

While my wife was in the hospital in Brisbane, I was in a hotel. I was on the telephone to the Department of State trying to get another assignment. It turned out that this was just at the start of the Asian financial crisis. They did have something available in the department of Korean Affairs of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. The Korea desk had something as an economic officer. I went to that department.

We moved back to the DC area. We were in a series of temporary apartments. My wife had an extremely difficult time because she was suffering from hyperacusis. She was sensitive to the slightest noise. Her auditory system lost the ability to modulate sounds so it would be sort of like you had your stereo on full blast and then turned it off but you didn't turn down the volume so the next time you turned it on, immediately you'd get this full blast of volume. So anytime a refrigerator motor went on or running water in the sink or rustling a newspaper, it was agonizing for her. She spent the first couple of weeks in this temporary apartment. She was in the linen closet with a bunch of pillows wrapped around her head trying to avoid every possible noise.

Our son quite his job in Portland and came to live with us so that he could take her from one doctor to the next to see if there was anybody who could help. Ultimately, there wasn't.

Suddenly we were back in the United States with a broken assignment and eventually found a good apartment up at McLean Gardens on Wisconsin Avenue, a little bit south of Tenleytown. I worked in the economic section of the Korea desk and I became active in automobile market access negotiations. We had marathon negotiating sessions with the Koreans, run by the U. S. trade representative's office. I also got involved in negotiations on market access for beef and negotiations on a bilateral investment treaty. I was fairly active there.

There was a lot of emphasis on North Korea at the time so I also filled in for various other desk officers in the department of Korean affairs as needed. It was good. I was able to keep busy.

Q: What were some of the issues?

CUSHING: Well, monitoring North Korean compliance with the Agreed Framework. There was this deal where they would ostensibly shut down their nuclear reactors and put the fuel rods in cans and put the cans under water and in exchange KEDO, the Korean Economic Development Organization which was a consortium of South Korea and Japan would build them light water reactors in North Korea to provide them with safe nuclear energy but there was not going to be any way they could reprocess it the fuel rods and so forth. So it was a very complicated agreement that was worked out under Bill Clinton. So that was still going on so we would be sending people to North Korea to work on that.

We did a lot with the Republic of Korea on their economic recovery, monitoring how well they were recovering from the Asian financial crisis and so forth.

Q: What was your impression?

CUSHING: They did very well. It was unfortunate that the International Monetary Fund had this sort of Procrustean Bed arrangement with all countries. A lot of small companies in South Korea went out of business because they couldn't get access to credit. It was a very draconian approach and it didn't have to be that draconian in Korea but the new president, Kim Dae Jung handled the crisis fairly well and so they were out of the worst of it within about 18 months. There were a lot of problems but they did OK.

Interestingly, during the beef market access negotiations the Koreans had a number of very discriminatory practices against imported beef from the United States. They would put it in racks in the back of the store next to the bathroom or they would put it way down on the bottom shelf where it wasn't visible or tell people they didn't have any and so forth.

The Korean delegation had this young woman who was the interpreter but the terminology got too complicated for her so I ended up as the de facto interpreter for the Korean side during the beef negotiations. This girl got more and more flustered and so I would speak to them in Korean, "Now is this what you are trying to say?" and then I would tell our side in English, "Well, that's not what they meant. They meant this." That was interesting because I became the interpreter for the Korean side and the U.S. side during the beef negotiations.

Q: How did they come out?

CUSHING: Right after that we had mad cow disease and so they shut all that down again. It was mostly cultural because for Korean beef, there are a lot of small ranchers. They have maybe three or four head of cattle on a farm and they feed them and slaughter them. They simply can't compete with the massive feedlots that are in the U.S. so they could not compete on price and probably not on quality although they said, "No, Korean beef tastes better because it is raised in Korea." The Japanese had the argument that Japanese intestines can't digest American beef. You can't use American skis in Japan because the snow is different, stuff like that. The Koreans came up with all sorts of similar things like, well, under Confucian tradition, a butcher is the lowest of the low so we feel uncomfortable bringing in meat that was butchered by Americans because we don't know what kind of sanitary conditions were used. They were just pulling stuff out of a hat. It was interesting. It was a good year.

I did one year there and then I went up to intelligence and research, INR and I did a lot of work on the policies of the Republic of Korea toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea. I ended up doing a lot of research on the northern limit line in the Yellow Sea because there was a line established as part of the armistice but it was not officially included in the agreement. It was an informal understanding that that was what the line was going to be. There is a very lucrative crab fishery in that part of the Yellow Sea.

Q: Is that near Kanghwa? There is an island off the coast. During the Korean War I spent a month sitting there monitoring Soviet airplanes.

CUSHING: I am not entirely sure but I know that it, there are a bunch of islands that are still occupied by South Korea just off the coast of North Korea and the line is supposed to go above them but the North Koreans were crossing the line to fish for blue crab and so there was a skirmish there in 1999 between North Korean and South Korean naval craft which ended with the sinking of a North Korean gunboat and several casualties. So that was a big issue.

I got involved in a lot of research on law of the sea and maritime boundaries and the status of the northern limit line because that was a fairly important issue while I was there.

I had a fellow there who rewrote virtually everything I ever wrote. I would write something and he would rewrite it entirely and then he would rewrite his own rewrite again. He was constantly rewriting and then when it got into the secretary's morning summary he would say, "That was a good piece you wrote" and I'd just bite my lip because he had rewritten it not only once but twice. I just thought oh, the hell with it. It was interesting and it was good practice in learning how to condense something complicated down to a very short report.

Then I went to Korean language school in Seoul from August of 2000 to June of 2001. It was a very rigorous program. There were a couple of Australians and a fellow from New Zealand. The Korean language school in Seoul had one supervisor and three language teachers and we had an agreement where we would take students from the embassies of the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia, anyplace that also spoke English. So we had a couple of Australians, a fellow from New Zealand, it was a pretty small group. I think there were eight students for three teachers so it was very intense. We'd have four hours of class every day and at least four hours of homework. I studied hard every day.

The Australian woman ended up getting a Korean boyfriend and so she learned her Korean that way. She eventually married the fellow.

One of the other Americans had a series of Korean girlfriends so he learned Korean that way. I was dropped into the second year. They waived the first year because I had already had Korean language in the Peace Corps so they dropped me into the second year. We had to read newspaper articles everyday and then report on the articles and discuss them in Korean and it was very rigorous. We'd have class from 9 to 3 and then I'd come back and study from 3 until about 9 at night so it was tough.

We took a study trip in the fall. We were supposed to go off and do an independent study trip so I took a trip to a number of coal mining towns in the northernmost province on the east coast, Kang Won Do, which is where I had been in Peace Corps so I toured the coal mines. I went deep underground at one coal mine and went along with the miners to the end of the seam. We all had these coveralls and helmets with flashlights on the helmets and so forth and got completely coated in coal dust.

The coal mining industry in Korea was moribund. It was about to close down. It was interesting because it had been very active when I was there in Peace Corps.

Q: The north had coal, didn't it?

CUSHING: The north has coal; the south has a lot of coal too. They've got more than they know what to do with. They just don't need it as much anymore. They've got nuclear reactors; all their locomotives are diesel, and very little charcoal is used for heating houses or cooking, so I think they pretty much closed down their coal industry. They were running on government subsidies for a while. I think at one point they were thinking of donating coal to North Korea simply because they had more than they could use. A lot of coal mining towns up in the mountains are ghost towns. The whole town has moved away.

The one thing they did try to do was they built a casino there which was the one place in the whole peninsula where Koreans could go to gamble. So they were getting a lot of people from Seoul coming up there to gamble and so forth. A lot of times they gave the coal miners early retirement and bought their houses and encouraged them to try to find something else to do.

I took another study trip in April of 2001 to Ulleungdo which is an island off the east coast. They have had a significant loss of population there now. There used to be 30,000 people and now there are 12,000. They grow pumpkins and do a lot of squid fishing and other fishing. They are not too far from the Liancourt Rocks, which they call Dokdo and the Japanese call Takeshima, which are these rocks that are under dispute about who owns them. That was interesting too. I spent a week there, traveled around there. I hiked up to the highest mountain; I took a boat trip around the island and so forth. Also during my year of language study I took music lessons on the Korean flute. I had a good year studying language.

Q: That was what year?

CUSHING: That was August of 2000 to June of 2001. We had various visitors; we had General Pak Sun Yup who had been the youngest Korean general in the Korean War who was sort of an elder statesman. We visited the Korean national cemetery, we visited the graves of Syngman Rhee and Park Chung Hee and so forth, did various museum trips too. I studied really hard. Being in language school there wasn't any such thing as taking a day off. You had the assignment and you had the homework and sometimes I would be the only student with the teacher so you couldn't just come in and say "I didn't do the assignment" because that's what you had to be doing. You couldn't just sit there and struggle through it making stuff up because the assignment had been given the night before so you had to do it so there I was.

I came into the embassy and the very first thing we encountered was a crisis related to the trafficking in persons report because there was a mandated report that had to cover every country, there was mandated legislation by Congress. You had to do a report on trafficking of persons in each country. In Korea there were a lot of Filipina and Russian girls working near the U.S. military bases, working at the nightclubs right outside the military bases. There were not many Korean girls still working there so they brought in girls from the Philippines, girls from Russia and so forth and they were being kept in abusive conditions. They were recruited in the Philippines and they were told they would be singers and dancers and so forth and then they were forced into prostitution.

The political officer just before me had attempted to work with the Korean government to get information for the report and all they said was, "We don't have this situation. We don't have a problem. I don't know why you keep bothering us. We have nothing to say to you." He was forced to say, "The problem exists, but the Korean government denies it exists." So they were ranked in the lowest possible category. They were in tier three of three tiers which is 'Refuses to acknowledge the problem and is not taking any steps to correct it' and so my first day there I was getting these frantic calls from Washington, DC asking, "Can you find out anything the Koreans have done to address the problem of trafficking in persons because otherwise they will end up in tier three and the assistant secretary doesn't want them to be in tier three. It's a big crisis." There was nothing I could do.

The next day the report came out and Korea was listed in tier three. They were outraged. I was getting all these outraged telephone calls from the Korean government saying why did you put us in tier three? It later came out that China and Japan had been informally warned a year before that they had to take some steps to correct the problem or they would end up in tier three. So the Chinese were warned, the Japanese were warned, 'Look, there is a TIP report coming out, trafficking in persons, TIP. If you don't do something, you will end up in the lowest level.'

The Koreans were never warned so when they found out that the governments of China and Japan had been warned and had been given a year to take some steps, they were outraged. Since I was the political officer who had that portfolio, I was getting these outraged calls from all these Korean government officials saying, "Why did you do this?" It was my second day on the job.

So I formed an interagency task force with the Korean government; the minister of justice, the minister of immigration, human rights council and so forth and so within a year, I was able to get them promoted from tier three to tier one. I said, "Look, you've got to start prosecuting these people."

I also worked with the labor attaché of the Filipino government. He was working with his own government. He had a problem there, because to get a working visa, an entertainer's visa from the government of the Philippines, these girls had to take an exam where they would sing a song or dance or something. They were sending in ringers to sing a song for them under a false name. They would send in someone to sing a song and then a little money would change hands and they would get the entertainer's visa.

We would visit these different entertainment areas around the military camps and talk with the girls. The owner of the establishment would say, "This is outrageous. I treat them very well. Yes, I have all their passports in my safe because they might lose them. You know how Filipinos are with money so I am keeping all their wages in one savings account under my name and when it is time, I will pay them. No, I am not starving them. They have instant noodles whenever they want. I give them an hour every Sunday to go to Mass. These girls aren't unhappy. Someone has been lying to you."

I worked together with a young fellow from the Russian embassy and we'd go out and talk to the girls from the former Soviet Union, find out what they were doing. A lot of Russian girls ended up marrying American soldiers and going to live in the United States so that was a pretty good deal for them

Within one year working with different ministries of the Korean government I was able to get them turned around and up into tier one in the next TIP report and so Secretary Powell sighted cited Korea as a success story.

Then we had the 2002 presidential elections, which started out with about 20 candidates. We had the Grand National Party of Lee Hoi Chang and we had the Millennium Democratic Party of Kim Dae Jung so I covered that extensively. I interviewed all the candidates. The ambassador invited the major candidates to his residence for breakfast.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

CUSHING: The ambassador was Thomas Hubbard. Steven Bosworth was the ambassador during my year in language school but he left just as I came in. Ambassador Hubbard arrived in Seoul on the night of September 11, 2001. Just as he got off the plane, the twin towers were attacked. That was his introduction to Seoul. He was a good ambassador, very nice guy, patient, very good guy.

I covered the 2002 presidential elections. I wrote about 100 cables all told and got a nice cable from Assistant Secretary Kelly praising me for my work. That summer two school girls were run over by an American armored vehicle during maneuvers. They were walking along a road and there was this armored vehicle where the observer and the driver were two different people. The driver couldn't see anything and the observer had to be on the lookout and somebody missed these two girls. They were about 13, 14 years old so these two girls were crushed to death under the treads of this vehicle. At the time it was the World Cup and Korea was doing very well in the World Cup so this kind of got pushed to the background.

After the World Cup was over, the Korean government said, "We want to try these two American soldiers in our court system" and the American government said, "No. Under the Status of Forces Agreement we will try them." They were both tried and the defense of the observer was "the intercom was working, I saw the girls, I screamed 'stop, stop' and the driver didn't stop. The defense of the driver was "the intercom wasn't working and I didn't hear anything and so I ran over the girls." Here are these two completely contradictory defenses and yet they were both acquitted. So they were both acquitted and left the country and the Koreans were outraged.

There were massive demonstrations that went from August all the way through December of 2002. There were candlelight vigils, they would have to ring the American embassy with police buses, bumper to bumper and they'd have riot police outside of them. There were huge, huge demonstrations.

I went out and covered them by pretending to be a foreigner who didn't speak English. I would work my way through the police lines and kind of stand in the back during the speeches and memorize the speeches and collect the leaflets and the posters and so forth. The DCM said, "Well, I don't really like what you are doing. If I ever see you on TV you will be out of the country. If I ever see you on television or I hear that you said anything, you will be finished in this embassy" but I continued to do it and never got caught. I'd go to these candlelight vigils at night.

I also observed a number of strikes, scuffles between workers and the police and so forth. There were issues with foreign workers because a number of Korean industries that technologically just should have been shut down because China was already more competitive, were being kept alive by bringing in foreign workers from say Mongolia or Sri Lanka or just any number of, countries, also the Philippines. They would bring in these foreign workers as trainees. The theory was they were there as trainees so they didn't have to be paid the minimum wage and so there were a number of small industries in plastics and various other little factories that were being kept alive by using foreign workers. Human rights groups were saying, "Oh, these workers are being abused" and so forth. I got involved in that issue also.

Under the new government of Roh Moo Hyun they were reforming labor laws because after the economic crisis a lot of workers had been brought back in as part time contract workers, did not have the same rights as regularly employed workers and so there was a lot of tension there between the unions and the government.

The unions had assumed that Roh Moo Hyun was going to be on their side because he ran on a platform of moderate anti Americanism. This was right during the whole brouhaha about the two girls being crushed to death. He said, "By God, when I am president, no American is going to run over two Korean citizens and get away with it."

So he was elected and not too long after that he was impeached in the National Assembly for supposedly speaking out in favor of his political party, because the president is not allowed to make political commentary so he was suspended from office and impeached and so I covered that also.

I was also the control officer for Dr. Kissinger when he visited to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of the Korean War. It was an active time.

Q: How stood relations? There had been earlier a new generation had come along and no longer as, you might say grateful or appreciative of what the United States had done.

CUSHING: When I was there, there was this radical Catholic priest, Father Moon, who held demonstrations in a small park about a block away from the Korean embassy and their complaint was that the United States had conspired with the Soviet Union to divide Korea so it was the United States' fault that Korea had been divided.

Also in Bush's State of the Union address he named North Korea along with Iraq and Iran as part of an "axis of evil." No one had bothered to check with the State Department on that. We were listening to the State of the Union address and he referred to North Korea as part of the 'axis of evil' and so our jaws kind of dropped there and the Koreans were miffed because they were trying to get all warm and fuzzy with North Korea and they said, "Oh, look. Now you hurt their feelings. It's going to make it harder for us."

There was a lot of sympathy for North Korea as sort of a misunderstood family member who if treated with loving kindness would come around. Kim Dae Jung had the sunshine policy. He had a summit meeting with Kim Jong Il in summer 2000. It turned out the administration of Kim Dae Jung transferred secretly about 100 million dollars to Kim Jong Il in order to have the summit meeting so essentially Kim Dae Jung was paying Kim Jong Il 100 million dollars to allow the south to send them free rice and free fertilizer which is sort of the same thing that I saw in New Guinea. OK, you can build us a free school and a clinic but you have to compensate us for loss of use of the land. Same kind of thing.

There were older Koreans who remembered the war and often when there was a large, anti-American demonstration at one point there would be a pro American demonstration several blocks away with Korean War veterans, Koreans who had served in the South Korean army during the war and were grateful to the Americans, and they would be waving American flags and saying God bless President Bush and so forth.

There is a statue of MacArthur on top of a hill in Inchon and there was a movement to remove the statue. People were saying "This is an anachronism of the Cold War, we're going to take it down, and we don't need it." These Korean War veterans formed a ring around the statue, saying, "We love General MacArthur and if you are going to take the statue down, you are going to have to kill us first."

The older generation was dying out. The younger generation was resentful of the military presence which has since been scaled back and also they are moving out of that huge base in Yongsan in the heart of Seoul, moving farther south and they are pulling a lot of people off the demilitarized zone.

Q: What were the North Koreans doing? Were they doing anything to sort of play up to this? One has the feeling they are not the most subtle people in the world.

CUSHING: They were allowing family visits. People would send in applications to the Red Cross. The North and South Korean Red Cross would work together so they had these, limited reunions; there was a resort area in the north just north of the demilitarized zone with this really famous mountain, Kum Kang San, and Hyundai Corporation set up a resort there with hotels and had these very tightly restricted tours where they'd come in by ship and stay on the ship and tour the mountain and go back to the ship and later they started allowing them in by bus but all the workers at the resort were Koreans from China. They wouldn't allow North Koreans to work there. They held family reunions at this resort at Kum Kang San. Families from the south would be allowed to go up there and selected families from the north that had been divided would go there so they had these very dramatic reunions but on a very limited scale. The north sent a few family groups down to the south to meet, but took pains too to make sure they didn't get a look at Seoul or anything. They would be bused to these rather isolated resorts where that would meet family members from the south but there was absolutely no political discussion whatsoever and they were not allowed to exchange any presents of real value or anything. That was kind of the one concession the north made. They allowed these very tightly restricted groups of tourists into a small part of North Korea.

They started an industrial zone near the North Korean town of Kaesong where the South Koreans would bring in the raw materials and the supervisory staff and they would employ North Koreans who would be paid three or four hundred dollars a month and the North Korean government would keep all but \$50 of that. The North Korean worker would end up with \$50 a month and the North Korean government would get \$350 of his wages. There was this joint cooperative industrial area, there was limited tourism and there were limited family reunions. There was a sunshine policy under Kim Dae Jung based on Aesop's fable of trying to get the winter coat off a man. The sun and the wind saw a man wearing a really heavy coat and so they made a bet. The wind said, "I bet I can get that coat off him." So the cold wind blew harder and harder and the harder it blew, the tighter the man clutched his overcoat. The sun said, "OK, now it's my turn." So the sun shone on the man, he got hotter and hotter and finally he took off the overcoat.

So President Kim Dae Jung said, "My sunshine policy is based on the philosophy that if you are nice to these people they will come around. All you have to do is be warm and fuzzy and send them rice and fertilizer and they will appreciate it and they'll help us." Finally, in 2007, Korea elected a president that said, "This is bullshit."

I finished at the embassy in Seoul in May of 2004 and the person who was my wife at the time had an aversion to cold weather, being rather thin and sensitive to cold so I had an opportunity to study two years of Chinese language and then go to a posting in Chengdu but when she read the post report, she read that it was often cloudy and gloomy. The winter days were short and cold and cloudy and the winter nights were long and cold and cloudy so she said, "I'm not going there" so

Q: Was Chengdu Harbin or Mukden?

CUSHING: No, Chengdu is down in the southwest of China. That is where the rioting mob trashed the principal officer's residence after the bombing in Belgrade where the three Chinese "reporters" were killed.

At any rate once again misfortune struck. Back before we went to Port Moresby we had a chance to go to Costa Rica but she said, "Oh, we've already been to Guatemala. Let's not get stuck in a rut in Central America" so we went to Port Moresby where she was attacked and almost killed. So once again she said, "Oh, I don't want you to study Chinese for two years and then go to Chengdu because it is dark and cold."

So I bid on a public affairs position in Cotonou, Benin in West Africa. So we went over there. I had public diplomacy training in Washington, DC from July to December, 2004. We had an apartment in Ballston and I walked over the Foreign Affairs Training Center every day for that. So we were in the States for the 2004 election.

Some of the things I did in Cotonou were, we set up an awards program for outstanding journalists and the ambassador awarded awards to them.

Q: Cotonou is the capital of?

CUSHING: Actually Porto Novo is the capital but most of the government ministries and the presidential mansion and so forth are in Cotonou so it is kind of an unusual situation because Porto Novo is about an hour's drive to the east, not too far from the border. Benin is a little country just west of Nigeria.

Mathieu Kerekou, the president, originally took over in a military coup and eventually was elected in a presidential election; there were hangers-on who were encouraging him to change the constitution so that he could run again but the ambassador made a few speeches suggesting that the constitution be adhered to as it was written and not amended and so the president very indignantly said he never had any intention of attempting to run again. He stepped down and there were presidential elections.

The ambassador had an extensive art collection so I worked on the art in embassy brochures, took a bunch of photographs of those and worked them up in brochures.

We had a fair amount of staff turnover at the American Cultural Center. I hired a new librarian, a new student adviser and a new cultural officer. We had a bare bones budget so it was a fairly difficult post because there was rarely enough money to do any of the things I would have liked. I worked entirely in French.

The roof was repaired with tar paper but they forgot to overlap the seams so one rainy season I had about four inches of water in most of my office. I had a carpet so they brought in some plastic sheeting so I just, I had a pool of about four inches of water in most of my office for several months, maybe about six months and I had mushrooms growing there and stuff like that. There just wasn't enough money for anything.

We got completely blown away by the French because the French were the former colonial power there. They had a military mission and they had an enormous embassy and they had an enormous cultural center with two performance spaces, one partially indoors and one out and they gave performances really often, and also had a big library.

We were tucked away in kind of an out of the way location, off of the beach front road and we got a fair number of people who wanted to study in the United States because we had a student adviser. We were also able to institute a program where students could take the test of English as a foreign language on the computer in Cotonou. We got that set up finally. Prior to that they had to go to Lagos, Nigeria or to Accra, Ghana to take the test so this helped a good bit. We had a fair number of students who went to the United States to study. We tried to help them get scholarships.

It was a very difficult post. There wasn't a heck of a lot to do. That is where my marriage finally came unglued. My wife left so I finished that post by myself.

We had an English school and we had a lot of problems with that but rather than cast disparaging remarks on the fellow who was the ambassador there, I think I might just leave it at that.

Q: Who was the ambassador there?

CUSHING: Wayne Neil. We had a lot of problems. It was tough, it was tough.

Q: Did we have any interest in Benin?

CUSHING: Preserving democracy, I guess. It is one of the 20 poorest countries in the world. I honestly don't know. Most of what the political section did, I think was just presenting demarches and so forth. There was a moderate interest in having an orderly succession of presidents and so after the new president was elected, President Bush's public affairs person, Karen Hughes flew over and met the president and there was a little bit of hoopla about that but other than that, it was a little backwater country, very primitive, a great deal of corruption, a small post and morale was not great.

Q: You are saying from a public diplomacy side that basically the French had control over that.

CUSHING: Well, the French pushed their message. They were friendly, we were tolerated and so forth but France being sort of the mother country, the former colonial power and so forth and French being the official language there, they really had the inside track.

Q: Did it make any difference? In a way in some places, put our resources somewhere else.

CUSHING: We had a few good things. We brought a traveling group over that sang American folk songs and they were very popular. We had a couple of concerts in Cotonou. We went out to Porto Novo and gave a concert there and went out to Ouidah and gave a concert there. We had the international visitor's program so we were able to send some young professionals from Benin to the United States on study tours. We had a visiting speaker's program so we had people who spoke on various aspects of American politics and culture and so forth. It was very much a backwater country.

I think a lot of interest in Africa was formerly based on the Cold War; the fact that the United States was vying with the Soviet Union and China for influence there and it was considered sort of a pivotal continent.

President Bush actually had a good initiative. The President's Emergency Program for Aids Relief, PEPFAR and that was well received there. There was a Peace Corps program there and so forth but it was by and large a small and unimportant country. I kind of remember it mostly as the place where my marriage came to an end and my wife had a breakdown and left. Let's just say it wasn't the highest spot of my Foreign Service career.

Q: You were there for how long?

CUSHING: I was there from late December of 2004 until about May of 2007, so about 2 ½ years.

Q: Did any students from Benin go to the United States and take a full course of studies?

CUSHING: Oh, yes, quite a few.

Q: And what did they do? Did they come back?

CUSHING: Some came back, some stayed there. There was actually a woman who was a professor at the University of Arizona. She came from a prominent family there. A lot of the elite had Portuguese names because there was a Portuguese business family there where the fellow had a lot of different wives and so there would be many Beninese who looked totally African but would have Portuguese names so this lady was Dr. D'Almeida and we gave a presentation at a university there and she had a interesting experience because she was talking to the students in Benin and she said, "If you mention African American life in America and if you mention African Americans to people in Africa, and if you mention Africans to African Americans in the United States, they both respond with the same word, which is 'savages'" so there was a total misconception on both sides as to what life was like for people so we worked on that a bit. I think by and large among a lot of folks in the United States, there is not a great deal of understanding about the vast diversity of countries on the African continent and so forth. Africa is traditionally viewed as sort of a hopeless place.

At any rate, that was my foray into public diplomacy. I did reasonably well with the limited resources that I had. It was a tough post in a lot of ways.

Q: Was there much interest in American culture?

CUSHING: Some, yes, there was some. Since the language of education was French and English was a second language, people primarily would get scholarships to France to study. There was some interest in American culture but not a great deal. France just seemed culturally and even geographically quite a bit closer than the United States so that was how it was.

Q: You left there in 2007?

CUSHING: Yes.

Q: Then what?

CUSHING: My final post was Port of Spain in Trinidad and Tobago and that was interesting. It was tough because that was the first place I went without my wife and we had a long period of separation that finally ended in divorce.

Trinidad and Tobago has considerable importance as being sort of the economic powerhouse of the southern Caribbean. It has liquid natural gas, it has petroleum reserves. About 70 % of the liquid natural gas that is supplied to the United States comes from Trinidad. It is comparatively well developed; they have shopping malls there and a cinema multiplex and restaurants and apartment buildings. It is a curious mixture because it has a lot of first world aspects but it also has a lot of rural poverty and bad roads and crime and corruption so it's kind of a mix.

The other interesting thing about Trinidad and Tobago is you have the racial division. Formerly there was sugar and coffee and a lot of the agricultural work was performed by African slaves until slavery was abolished in Britain and then the slaves were freed and they needed people to work in agriculture so they finally concluded that indentured servants from India would be the best bet. In the 1850s they brought in a number of Indians and more and more boatloads of Indians came over so it is partly analogous to Fiji in the Pacific in that the population is about 40 % of African origin, 40 % of East Indian origin and there is an amalgam of mixed race; Syrians, Lebanese, French, Venezuelan, Chinese.

The two major political parties tended to form on the basis of race. The People's National Movement predominated in politics. They had been in power most of the time there. The United National Congress had power for a while but there was a deadlock in Parliament and the president decided that the leader of the People's National Movement would be a more appropriate prime minister so they named him the prime minister and he's had power ever since.

The leader of the United National Congress, Basdeo Panday, was a former labor leader and a very flamboyant fellow but getting on in years. They added five seats to Parliament so it used to be 21 for the People's National Movement and 16 for the Congress of the People but then they added five more seats but this just resulted in more gains for the People's National Movement. I believe there are now 26 PNM seats to 15 for the United National Congress.

There was an upstart party in the 2007 elections. The Congress of the People was a new party that came in and they attempted to draw off middle class voters, people who wanted a new approach, establish post-ethnic politics and so forth and they got 23% of the vote but no seats just because of the way the votes were distributed.

There is a great deal of crime there based on narcotics smuggling. It is only seven miles from Venezuela so a lot of narcotics come over by boat at night so you have cocaine and so forth arriving for transshipment to Europe. Put it on a plane there, send it off to Europe.

Weapons, lots of illegal firearms brought in and sold. There are some neighborhoods in Port of Spain where you simply don't want to go. The people who live there can go there if they roll the windows of their car down and go in very slowly because they have sentries at all the streets that enter and sometimes there are gangs at war from neighborhoods who are very close to each other so the people who live in one neighborhood, sometimes they cannot go a few blocks down the street because that territory is controlled by a different gang or sometimes they can't cross the street because the block on the other side of the street is controlled by a different gang. Sometimes people are killed simply for being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

There used to be a lot of kidnapping for ransom, primarily East Indian businessmen would be kidnapped and held for ransom. There was a period when a number of them sent their families out of the country and stayed by themselves. An American citizen was kidnapped and killed about three years ago and so the FBI got involved, broke up that gang so the number of kidnappings went down considerably. I think there was exactly one Syrian kidnapped, once. The Syrians got to the kidnappers before the police did and chopped them up into little pieces and mailed the pieces to the other gangs and said "This is what happens when you kidnap a Syrian." That was the end of that.

There was a fair amount of work at the embassy trying to fight crime. We have the Drug Enforcement Agency down there; we have a legal attaché½ from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. They were also working with Guyana, the neighbor of Venezuela which is also a very lawless place. I never got over to Guyana; I guess it is a pretty wild place.

Trinidad was a small island but there was a fair amount to do. There was excellent bird watching and you could see the leatherback turtles come up on the beach to lay their eggs and you could go to the swamp and see the Scarlet Ibis flying in, so forth.

I joined a choral group there; we would rehearse in the evenings twice a week and give concerts in the summer and at Christmas. That was good.

The big thing that happened there was that Trinidad and Tobago hosted the Summit of the Americas and in April of 2009 so that was a tremendous undertaking because we had the new president come down, the secretary of state, a number of congressional delegations decided they would come along too and so logistically, Embassy Port of Spain is a comparatively small post and we were swamped; we had a tremendous amount of work to do. They sent a huge number of temporary people to help us and of course, we had a presidential advance team and we had to scout out all the sites and get permission from the local government to photograph the sites and lay out the floor plans and everything. It was a tremendous undertaking. It went off successfully.

The government tends to be disorganized unless something is really important to them. The most important thing for anybody down there is carnival time where right before Lent they have several days of carnival where they buy these exotic costumes and they all march in groups. They've got a sound truck with an enormous bunch of speakers blasting away. People dance in the streets for two days and two nights. Carnival is a big deal.

I was talking to a fellow from Venezuela who said, "Well, the only way Summit of the Americas will come off without a hitch is if it is as important to them as carnival is because that is the only thing that starts on time." There is a very laid back attitude toward doing anything on time, starting something on time.

The government suffers from a fair amount of disorganization and corruption. There is a middle class. There is a lot of poverty out in the country because the government tends to neglect areas that are going to vote for the United National Congress which is the opposition, so there is a fair amount of discontent.

They are trying to revive parts of agriculture. They closed down the sugar industry not that long ago. They are trying to get coffee and chocolate revived but they are essentially a one resource economy. They have their liquid natural gas and there is still petroleum that they are extracting.

In terms of foreign policy, they have this Caribbean Economic Community, CARICOM so they tend to vote with CARICOM and they try to strike an independent line from the United States. Trinidad and Tobago actually voted with the United States only about 18% of the time in the United Nations. Still, relations are good.

There is a British high commission and a Canadian high commission and an Australian high commission because being a former British colony and a Commonwealth country, they still have strong relations with other Commonwealth countries. And there is a Japanese embassy and a small Korean embassy and then various South American countries; Mexico, Venezuela and some of the other smaller South and Central American countries have embassies there also.

It is a very nice setting. It is on the Gulf of Paria and it has hills, fairly tall, steep hills in the background so some of the residential neighborhoods go up into the valleys and so forth. It was interesting.

Q: Do we have any installations there; airplanes or ships?

CUSHING: No, it was very important during the Second World War. There use to be a number of airfields there, because of the German U-boats in the Caribbean. They have pretty much all been closed down. The northwestern part of the island used to be totally controlled by the United States. I guess they leased it and they held onto it until the early 1960s when it was finally returned.

What we had a couple of times were ship visits where the United States navy has hospital ships that are designed primarily for goodwill visits so they would come and they would have a team of doctors, dentists, various specialists. They would go out and establish temporary clinics in traditionally underserved parts of the island and they got a very good response because for all its wealth, the public health system there is not very good.

The prime minister himself, whenever he has a medical problem flies to Cuba. He had a pacemaker installed in Cuba, he had artificial valves installed in Cuba and he had cancer of the kidney last December, flew to Cuba to get his cancerous kidney removed.

So people are always saying, "OK, if the public system here is so good, how is it that any time the Prime Minister has a health problem, he flies off to Cuba?" In the interests of Caribbean solidarity, they don't charge him there. They just fly him there and fix whatever is going on and then bring him back.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

CUSHING: Our ambassador was Dr. Roy Austin. Dr. Austin was originally from the island of St. Vincent and he studied in the United States and became a professor there. St. Vincent is not too far from Trinidad and Tobago. You've got St. Vincent and the Grenadines, just north of Grenada. He got a scholarship to study in the United States and as is traditional for people who get scholarships there, he deferred his study for a few years so he could work and save up some money for personal expenses. He ended up going to Yale at the same time as George W. Bush. I believe they were either roommates or in the same fraternity. He is a personal friend of George W. Bush. He was named ambassador in 2001, I believe, so he was there for an extended period of time. He was there until January 20 of 2009 when our new president was inaugurated so he had quite a long run as an ambassador. He was a professor of criminology at Penn State when he was asked to be the ambassador. He was able to relate to the people very well so he got along quite well.

The prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago had been a member of Parliament for a long time. I think he was first elected in 1972 and he was the leader of the party after they had a couple of setbacks but they are now in a comfortable majority.

I guess the other thing worth mentioning was there was a coup by a radical Muslim group in Port of Spain in 1990. They took over the Parliament and held the members of Parliament hostage and a police station in Port of Spain was burned down and there was widespread looting and disorder for about three or four days until the army finally restored order and the leaders of this coup surrendered.

The person who led the coup is still free. Apparently, one of the agreements they had for freeing the hostages was that there would be an amnesty. So he is free and he runs an Islamic school in Port of Spain and he is allegedly involved in illegal quarrying. Quarrying is big business because there is still a fair amount of construction there, they are digging up the hillsides for gravel. They have a significant problem with flooding when it rains. The streets in Port of Spain tend to fill up with water because the drains are clogged with plastic bottles and other refuse that people toss into the drains.

One of the other issues is Chinese foreign workers. A lot of the big government construction projects now are being built by Chinese labor. There will be a private contracting group that will work something out with the government and then bring in a whole bunch of Chinese construction workers, house them in fairly basic conditions and have them do the construction work. People complain that these construction jobs should be going to local people but the retort of the local contractors trying to get the construction done is, "Well, the local people won't work a full day." If you hire a person from Trinidad, he will find a big piece of hollow pipe and go in there and start taking a nap or something. It is really difficult to get people to work.

They had a couple of make work projects that were also subject to corruption. There was CEPEP, which was the Community Environmental Protection and Economic Preservation program where they would get people who were traditionally unemployed, they would hire them to do a weed whacking job on the side of the road or rake up things or clean out the drains but it was mostly a matter of signing in and doing a minimal amount of work and getting paid and then leaving before noon and going out and doing whatever else they wanted to do.

Then there was the URP, the Unemployment Relief Program which tended to be taken over by the gang leaders. The prime minister had the idea that if he turned these gang leaders into "community leaders" and entrepreneurs that they would leave their life of crime, and so what happened there was they would take a lump sum of money and then they would put together a list of phantom employees, all of whom would be paid but the gang leader who was now this community entrepreneur would dole out a little bit of money to each person who signed up as a ghost employee and some to his two or three followers and keep most of it for himself. There was a lot of corruption in that.

A lot of areas where these supposed community improvement projects were taking place were so dangerous that government inspectors would not even go up there. They didn't even want to go up there and have a look at what was going on. This was one reason a lot of gang leaders were getting killed was because someone else would want to be the person in charge of getting these large sums of money connected to a contract and so they would kill the leader and take his place.

The murder rate was extremely high. The population is about 1.3 million and I believe in 2008 there were something like 550 murders, which is extremely high. It is maybe not quite as high as Jamaica but it is high.

Q: Were these mostly gang murders?

CUSHING: Mostly turf wars, gang leaders killing each other, people caught in the crossfire.

There was a case where a little ten year old girl was found strangled and stuffed under an abandoned house and the story going around was that her mother was using her as a courier running cash for drug deals; she didn't know what was going on but she would have a lunchbox full of cash and they'd tell her, "Take this down the street and give it to the man who says hello to you on the corner." At some point she took the money down and either it wasn't enough money or someone stole the money and murdered this little girl. Every now and then there is a child killed, either caught in crossfire or abducted and killed or something like that. There is a big hue and cry for a couple of days and then everything goes back to normal.

The national culture is based on loud music, alcohol and fornication. That's pretty much it, which of course has its apex at carnival. People are always partying. They are famous for the steel drums. During the war they got these oil drums and converted them into musical instruments so that's considered an integral part of their culture.

Q: And the songs too.

CUSHING: Oh, the calypso.

Q: I remember as a kid during World War II. There was a famous song, Drinking Rum and Coca Cola. Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters.

In a culture based on fornication was there anything you could contribute to that as far as the USIA public diplomacy point of view?

CUSHING: Not really. I was the chief of the political section so I had one junior officer and two assistants working with me. We put a lot of effort into INL, international narcotics and law enforcement. We had a certain pot of money so we would work with the government of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of training. We had people come down to train people on financial crimes, money laundering and the Drug Enforcement Agency was extremely active also. They were not allowed to participate operationally but they would do a lot of intelligence sharing with the law enforcement authorities. I think as in most countries, the quantities of drugs interdicted and people arrested were just a small, small percentage of the amount that was getting through.

Q: I would have thought this would have been a place as a senior officer you would have been concerned about your junior officers getting into trouble in crime things or inadvertently or what have you.

CUSHING: No, the junior officers, a lot of them were already married, even the consular officers. I had a very good junior officer; he was already married and had two daughters, a very hard worker and his wife was the community liaison officer so she organized cultural excursions and trips and things like that.

Because of the mix of cultures the East Indian and the African based culture, there were a lot of things to do; a lot of interesting arts and crafts and music and dance and so forth and they actually had a pretty good national museum that traced the history of Trinidad and Tobago, the Spanish settlement, the petroleum industry, the Second World War and they had a huge section on carnival costumes also because that's where a lot of the creativity came in was designing these costumes for carnival.

Q: Did you get involved or did he go there, Naipaul or what was his name?

CUSHING: V.S. Naipaul was born there, then left on a scholarship to England. He wrote a couple of his books about Trinidad. He is kind of considered an ungrateful native son because when he got his Nobel Prize for Literature he didn't mention Trinidad once. In his memoirs he talks about how he couldn't wait to get out of there, how his father was a reporter for the Guardian newspaper but never had a particularly successful career. Naipaul referred to Trinidad as a small island for small men with small dreams.

Q: You were there from when to when?

CUSHING: Kind of off and on; I was there from June of 2007 through July of this year, 2009 but I was medically evacuated for four months. I had some medical issues so I was medically evacuated to the States at the end of June, 2008 and then I spent some time in hospital in Miami and then I went out to San Francisco and spent a fair amount of time waiting for surgery there. I eventually had the surgery in early September and recuperated and got back there in early November so I guess July, August, September, October, four months I was out of there on medical evacuation status and fortunately my junior officer was a very capable fellow and just filled in and did what needed to be done. We also had very good local staff; we had a Trinidadian woman who used to work in the office of the president and she knew all the major people in politics, economics, business, the police and we had another woman who had extensive experience in international narcotics and law enforcement so she worked very well with the junior officer on that.

There was a lot of budget and fiscal work and program monitoring and checking on the status of the equipment that we had loaned to them and so forth. We had things like patrol aircraft and patrol boats and so forth. We had a kind of combined approach because from the Department of State we had this international narcotics and law enforcement program which also included sending police and military officers up to the United States for training and then we had the Drug Enforcement Agency, then we had the Federal Bureau of Investigation and we also had someone from the United States Customs working with the customs department of Trinidad and Tobago, helping them out with custom, as well as a Military Liaison Officer. We did a fair amount of good work down there.

The corridors for shipping drugs would shift back and forth. If you put pressure on the west, if you tried to shut down the area from Colombia up to say Haiti or the Dominican Republic, it would shift eastward and it has gotten to the point now where there are some aircraft that fly from Colombia all the way to West Africa and they don't bother to try to get the aircraft back. They just land it somewhere and offload the drugs and maybe set the aircraft on fire or just leave it there. Narcotics were a big problem.

Q: You were there and it still continues with the advent of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and particularly as he developed it turned things around as far as our relations with that country. Today they are not good. Did the Chavez regime impact at all on Trinidad and your work?

CUSHING: Their foreign policy is based primarily on not upsetting Venezuela. They have to be careful because they are so close, and they have some shared cross border gas fields. The liquid natural gas is all under the sea and Venezuela had this ALBA free trade program of its own but Trinidad and Tobago decided to stick with FTAA, Free Trade Area of the Americas and the various programs with CARICOM. They don't qualify for a lot of the trade benefits because they are considered an advanced country, since they have a comparatively high gross domestic product per capita. There was a little bit of a falling out. I think Prime Minister Patrick Manning visited Caracas one time and announced that he was sticking with the Free Trade Area of the Americas instead of joining with ALBA.

Also there is another program that Venezuela has, Petrocaribe, where they sell petroleum products to small Caribbean nation island states at very concessionary rates; give them a loan to buy the petroleum and charge very low interest and so forth.

Chavez has thrown a lot of money around in the Caribbean and in other Central American countries trying to set up this anti-American axis, working with Bolivia and Ecuador and so forth. He had been on the outs with Colombia for quite a while.

The major foreign policy initiative of Trinidad and Tobago is not to upset Venezuela. They have to live with them as neighbors. You can see Venezuela from Trinidad and Tobago. Not to sound like Sarah Palin, but you can see Venezuela from there.

Q: Were there sort of Venezuelan agents prowling around?

CUSHING: Probably. They had a big embassy. I got along pretty well with the Venezuelans. The Venezuelans have a cultural center where they give free Spanish language lessons and some of our people took advantage of that.

We had a couple of incidents where a patrol plane flew into Venezuelan air space inadvertently one time so there was a little bit of a tiff about that and Chavez expelled the United States ambassador to Venezuela at one time so the Venezuelan ambassador was sent out of the United States. Now they are back.

The thing is Chavez just keeps stomping out one democratic institution after another; he revokes the broadcasting licenses for independent radio and television stations and clamps down on the media, clamps down on businesses and so forth. He appears to be making a total hash of the economy. PDVSA, the state petroleum company, their production is falling because they haven't kept up with the latest technology and maintenance and so forth and Chavez has sort of set up a parallel economy but there are shortages of basic food items and so forth.

They have people keeping an eye on things in Trinidad and Tobago but there is not a great deal of tension. There is a large Venezuelan embassy there and people get along OK.

Q: How about Cuba?

CUSHING: Really small. The Cuban embassy, is located above an auto parts store. There is an auto parts store and the second floor is the Cuban embassy and I guess there is an ambassador and maybe two other people. Trinidad and Tobago has a trade promotion center in Cuba and also an embassy there. But very few people in Trinidad and Tobago speak Spanish, a very small number considering how close they are, it just never really caught on. They say the rule of thumb there is the lower a person's social status is, the more likely he is to know Spanish because the fishermen get involved with the Venezuelan navy and coast guard from time to time because they crossed over the maritime boundary so they know some Spanish and the smugglers who bring in the drugs and the guns and also transport people, primarily young ladies for the entertainment industry, also know Spanish but the higher classes pride themselves on speaking impeccable British English and not knowing a word of Spanish.

Actually I was doing a report on Venezuelan influence and I asked around about how many Venezuelans there are in Trinidad Tobago and a lot of the Trinidadians would say, "Too many." There are Venezuelans working with some of the oil companies in Trinidad and Tobago. There are various businesses there and there are a lot of people with Hispanic surnames because at one point they brought people over from Venezuela I think to revive the chocolate industry to try to get them to plant cacao and so forth. They had fairly healthy industries in cacao and coffee but after the discovery of petroleum and the fact that petroleum kind of took over everything, the roads were allowed to deteriorate and younger people don't want to work in agriculture very much so it kind of died out.

The traditional split now, although there are some people of Venezuelan descent, people of French descent and so forth, is about 40% African descent and 40% Indian and the way it kind of falls out is that the Indians, the Syrians and the Lebanese are large players in business and industry and so forth. The Indians tend to be professionals, maybe in finance, attorneys, doctors, communications and so forth and the people of African descent tend to gravitate more toward the government. They will be the backbone of the police, the military, the government bureaucracy and so forth.

In our embassy we had people of African descent and Indian descent working together. You will find that in many businesses. Between individuals, there is no overt hostility but I think when it is time to socialize, they tend to stick with their own groups.

Q: Is there a split between Trinidad and Tobago?

CUSHING: A little bit. Tobago was kind of added to the federation rather late. It belonged to the French and the Dutch, various people and it is more oriented toward tourism. It's a much smaller island, doesn't have much petroleum or anything and it has partially autonomous status in that there is a Tobago House of Assembly so they have a little bit of say over local laws and legislation and so forth but anything involving taxation, finance, defense, foreign affairs, they have to defer to Trinidad. Tobago has about 6% of the total population. Its major sources of income are transfers of government money from Trinidad and a certain amount of tourism. The beaches are better on Tobago.

Q: Did you have any big cruise ships come in?

CUSHING: Cruise ships come in to Port of Spain. Tobago is more package tours from England and Germany and so forth; an international flight will fly directly into the airport in Tobago and offload.

The cruise ships that come in to Port of Spain tend to come in during the day and the people go and look around Port of Spain and so forth and then hop on the ship that night and then they sail away either that night or the next morning.

Trinidad itself does not have much tourism, except for carnival; the diaspora in Canada and the U.S. and England comes back for carnival. You've got a fair amount of foreign tourists for carnival but apart from that, it's got some great hiking in the mountains, it's got a very good nature center which has good bird watching but it doesn't seem to have wide appeal for tourists. You get these very small niches; serious bird watchers will come down to this nature center which is a converted cocoa plantation which is up in the mountains where there is a large number of birds and people will come up there and stay for several days and they'll come from China, Germany, U.S., any number of places if they are really dedicated bird watchers. Other than that, people if they are in the country, will do things like go on the swamp boat tour to see the scarlet ibis or they will go out to the beach to watch the leatherback turtles coming in to lay their eggs. That's pretty much it. The preponderance of the tourism is on Tobago and they also say that they probably should be doing more to be competitive with a lot of the other Caribbean islands.

Q: You left there quite recently?

CUSHING: I did, yes.

Q: So what are you going to do?

CUSHING: I took the retirement seminar and the jobs search program. I am wrapping up the job search program and my plan now is to move out to Albuquerque, New Mexico. I established contact with an old friend there. We are planning to build a house out there in the desert next spring. She will be retiring at the end of December and we are going to build a house and I am hoping to start a big vegetable garden. I am also looking for some work but it sort of depends on what sort of work and whether I can do it from out there.

Q: Sounds great. Well, thank you very much. This has been very interesting. You certainly moved around.

CUSHING: That I have. I never really established a home bureau.

Q: That's always a problem but at the same time it means you get to see things.

CUSHING: This is true.

End of interview